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THE LONDON READER

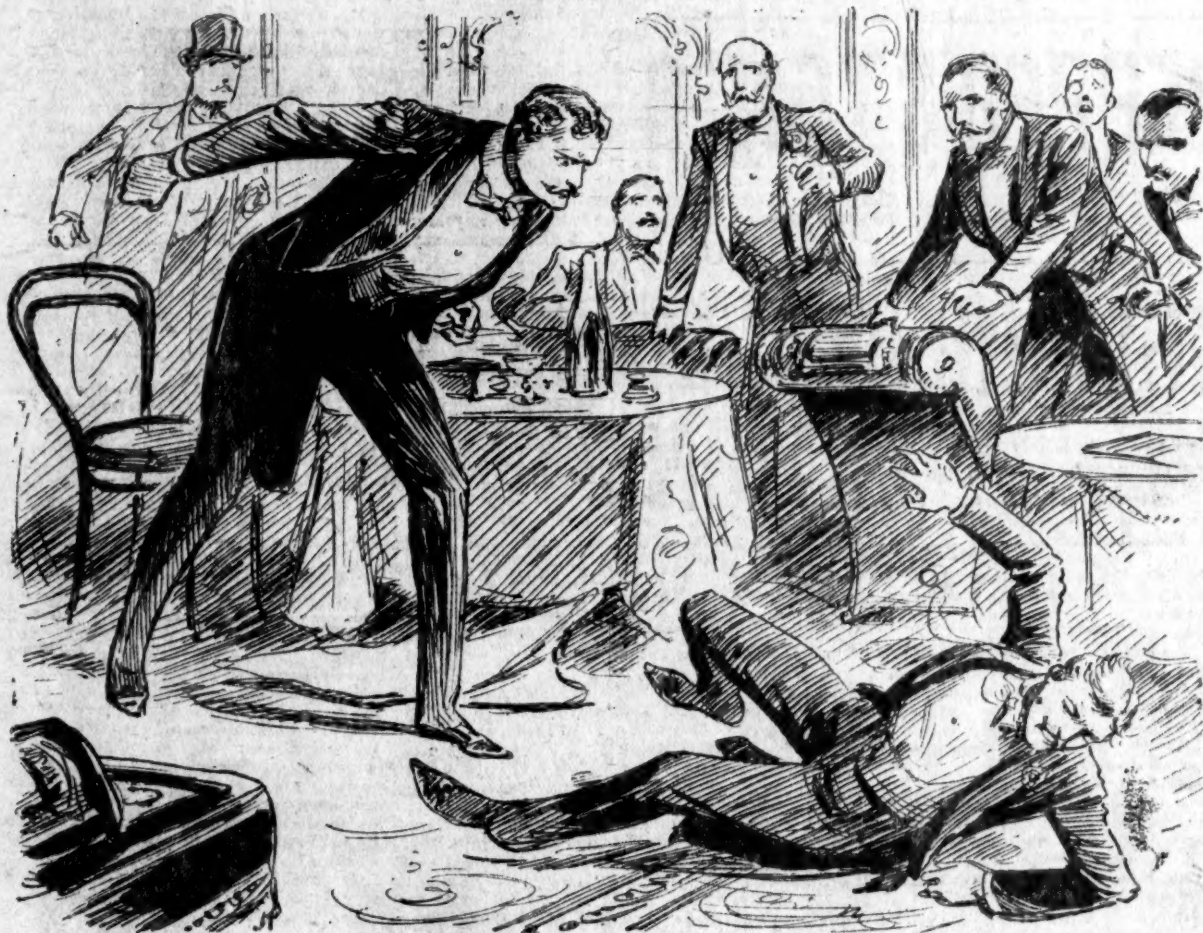
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GABRIEL STRUCK OUT, HITTING VALENTINE RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES, AND HE FELL DOWN STUNNED AND BLEEDING.

UNCLE RICHARD'S MONEY.

By the Author of "A Lady in the Case," &c.

[A NOVELETTE.]

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

CHAPTER I.

EDITH had no great desire to see the Thorne's. She simply accepted the invitation because they had invited her, and she had nowhere else to go now that her uncle was dead.

He had never been very kind to her during his life, but still she missed him just a

little, as she would have missed some old landmark, such as an old house, or some ancient tree she had often gazed upon.

She had eaten at the same table with him, and had sat in the same pew; consequently, when she went to breakfast, dinner, or tea, or to church, she was conscious of his absence.

It was not that Edith was hard-hearted in any way, although the old man had tried to make her so; but it is seldom that a man who behaved in the manner Richard Thorne had ever wins the love of anyone.

He had clearly shown by every action of his life that he neither cared nor wished for sympathy; so no one shared in his joys, if he had any, or his sorrows, if he knew what sorrow meant.

Richard Thorne put one in mind of some old house that had been allowed to pass into decay. He had neglected to cultivate his mind, or to allow the light of charity to enter into his soul, till at length a sort of withering dry-rot had taken possession of his heart; and his unwholesome life was not regretted when it passed away.

Richard Thorne had been an ill-natured man all his life, so it was natural that he should have made an eccentric and ill-natured will.

He had only done what was expected of him, so no one was surprised, and to most people it was a more reasonable document than had been anticipated, for the property was left to his niece, Edith, and nephew, Gabriel, on the condition they married. The one who

Jewellery and Silver Watches for All. See Page 72.

refused to carry out his wishes was to forfeit everything.

Richard Thorne knew very well that Gabriel had engaged himself to someone before he left for the war. But this only made the miserable old fellow more determined that the young man should marry Edith.

The mere fact that Gabriel did not desire to do so had induced the old man to leave his money in this way.

It would have been so easy to have divided his property between Edith and Gabriel, leaving them to do as they liked.

Edith had found one advantage in living under Richard's roof. The place was so dull that she had many opportunities of improving her mind.

She could speak many languages, and was altogether a most cultivated young lady.

Of course, Edith was highly indignant when she heard the will read, and she determined to show Gabriel, when she met him, what she thought of the matter.

The brilliant idea had occurred to her to make herself as disagreeable to Gabriel as possible, so as to force him to refuse to marry her.

Edith was a dark, handsome girl, with large flashing black eyes, and a very quick temper of her own.

Her quick, impulsive temper was not her only fault, for she had a provoking way with her that made others lose their temper too.

What kind of girl she would have been if Mr. Richard Thorne had not brought her up we cannot tell, but we think we are justified in saying that he had succeeded in spoiling the girl's character.

When a child he had done all in his power to break her in, as he called it; and the result of this had been that she had grown obstinate and resentful.

One of the punishments that Mr. Richard Thorne often inflicted upon his niece when she disobeyed and defied him was to carry her up to a dismal garret on top of the large house and lock her in.

Many bitter tears had the girl shed in that lonely chamber. Many times had she struck the thick door with her little clenched fist, and shrieked until exhausted.

She had a horror of the place, and would watch the advance of darkness with the utmost dread, conjuring up horrible unrealities in her childish terror. But never once did she give in, although he tried to tame her as wild beasts are tamed, by keeping her on a short allowance of food.

It is doubtful if Mr. Richard Thorne would have liked Edith half so much if she had been soft, shy, and yielding.

He could not help admiring a girl who had such a strong, indomitable will, who had never once stooped to ask for forgiveness at his hands, no matter what chastisement she received.

Kindness had never yet been tried with her, and the girl had grown up bold and self-reliant.

Mr. Richard Thorne had often expressed his opinion that she would come to a very bad end, and she had often retorted that she did not care if she did; and he admired her all the more for her fierce defiance of him.

Then there came a time when she was too big to be carried up to the garret, and Richard Thorne had to content himself by scolding her.

One day, when the girl was fourteen years of age, he had boxed her ears, and she had taken up the inkstand and threw it at his head.

He had never laid a hand upon her since; but the inkstains remain on the wall of the house until this day.

Edith read many novels, but the love parts she could not get on with, for it seemed such a lot of nonsense to her, for she was not at all a sentimental girl.

The stories that she liked were those of life and adventure, and she would devour these kind of books very eagerly.

The girls and women she had met she had no sympathy with, and she did not understand them.

It was on her nineteenth birthday that Edith arrived at Berner's End, and drove down the wide, sleepy High-street in a hired vehicle.

There was a dull, threatening sky overhead, but no rain, although there were many indications of the recent storm. The signpost of the "Blue Lion" had been blown down, and the road was very muddy.

The town was considered to be a picturesque one, for there were wooden houses with colonnades, and the ivy-covered church was ever so many years old, but on that particular day the place looked dismal.

"Miserable hole!" thought Edith, with a curl of her lip. "I would sooner die at once than remain here all my life! No theatres, no concert-halls, or anything lively! I have lived in a monotonous way, and want a change!"

It is a curious thing that the young have a habit of wishing themselves dead on the most slender provocation; but the older a person gets the more rare this expression is heard to pass their lips. Perhaps aged people are afraid that King Death will take them at their word.

Young Mr. Bartley, grocer and provision merchant, was standing at his door in the whitest of aprons, and he looked at the cab curiously as it went by, and wondered indolently where the girl was going to, and where she came from.

His curiosity was soon gratified, for the dirty white horse was pulled up before a weatherbeaten, red-brick house, on the door of which was a brass plate.

"It's Mr. Thorne's niece," observed the young grocer; and, having solved the mystery, retired into his shop with a look of great satisfaction on his good-tempered face.

Before the cabman had descended from his perch and knocked at the brightly-varnished door it was opened, and Edith entered the house with an almost disdainful smile.

There was a great deal of bustle and excitement on Edith's arrival.

Mrs. Thorne was touchingly demonstrative, and kissed Edith again and again. Mr. Thorne was very differential, and his two sons seemed delighted to see their cousin.

May was the only one who showed no enthusiasm in the matter, and Edith liked her all the better for it.

"She, at all events, is not a hypocrite!" thought Edith, who had a very suspicious mind.

Edith was worldly-wise enough to know that if she had presented herself at the lawyer's house without any money, she would not have had such a pleasant reception; for, to tell the truth, everyone over-acted their part.

Edith was given the most comfortable chair in the room, which she accepted as a matter of course, for the girl had a keen appreciation of her own ease and comfort, and a selfish disregard for other people.

May looked at her kindly as she reclined in the easy chair, one soft, brown arm supporting her dark, shapely head.

"My cousin Edith is both conceited and selfish," May told herself, "and looks down upon us all. I wish my father and mother would not make themselves so humble before this girl. She is probably laughing at them in her sleeve!"

Mrs. Thorne insisted upon Edith putting on a pair of slippers, for her feet must be damp, and warmed them, with her own hands.

And the girl allowed herself to be petted, and smiled at them in all derision; and her cool insolence brought a flash of annoyance to May's face.

She felt ashamed of her father, ashamed of her mother, ashamed of them all; for why should they worship Edith as if she was some superior being?

It hurt May's fine sense of dignity to see her relations stooping so low; and the worst of it all was that Edith knew very well their object in receiving her so tenderly.

Mr. Thorne rang the bell impatiently for the servant to bring up the tea-things, for no doubt Edith was tired and thirsty, and there is nothing like a cup of tea to revive one after a long railway journey.

"There will be no chance for poor Isidore when Gabriel sees Edith," thought May, feeling angry with her cousin for being so very handsome.

Edith could not exactly be called beautiful, but there was a charm about her that made a great impression on all with whom she came in contact—a witchery in a glance from those liquid eyes, an almost irresistible temptation in those coral lips, a fascination in manner that few could resist.

The girl knew very well how attractive she was, and in her youthful vanity thought herself a thousand times more fascinating than she really was.

Edith was neither too tall or too slim, and her waist was not at all tightened in.

Undoubtedly the girl was vain—vain of the healthful glowing colour in her cheeks, so startling in contrast to her broad, white, intellectual brow, proud of her little hands and feet; but she had too great a regard to her own health and personal comfort to wear tight stays or boots.

She had never taken the trouble to hide the selfishness of her nature, and she had never yet curbed her fierce, fiery temper, and she had fully made up her mind that Gabriel should see her at her worst. If he dared to marry her he would find her a most untamable shrew.

Her cousin Jack handed her a cup of tea, and she took it as she might have taken it from a waiter. No one was astonished at her behaviour, for she had a cool way with her which was quite edifying to see. If it was not insolence and pride at all events it was something very near it; but no one resented her conduct in any way, and Edith did not care a snap of the fingers for their opinion.

She felt lazily good-tempered as she sat by the fire, sipping her tea, scarcely deigning to answer the many questions that were put to her.

"Oh, these tiresome people, will they never cease chattering?" she thought. "Can't they see plainly enough that I am bored to death?"

Edith was like a sleek pretty kitten, very playful at times, but ever ready to show her claws at the least provocation.

"What time did you start this morning?" asked Mr. Thorne with anxious solicitude.

"Ten o'clock," replied Edith, with a long-drawn yawn, that showed her gleaming white teeth. "What slow trains you have here, they never go beyond twenty miles an hour!"

"You found the town very picturesque?" said Mr. Thorne. "Doubtless you observed the colonnade and the ivy-clad church. I daresay it struck you as very pretty?"

"Pretty?" said Edith, speaking louder than she had spoken before. "I call it a horrid place! Surely you would not remain here, unless compelled by circumstances over which you have no control?"

"Like most young people you are fond of change," ventured Mr. Thorne, for he had his doubts how Edith would take this remark.

"I have no desire to dream away my life in a sleepy old town," said Edith, and then there came a loud knock at the front door. Edith was looking towards May, and saw her start and change colour.

"Her sweetheart, I suppose," thought Edith, "an awful awkward fellow who has never been beyond Berner's End in his life."

But Edith was wrong for once, sagacious and far-seeing as she usually was; for there was a firm footstep in the hall, a manly voice, and when the parlour door was open, everyone but Edith called out the name of Gabriel. He was the hero of the family, the only one for many generations who had made the army his profession, and they were all proud of him. Their greeting of Gabriel was as natural as their reception of Edith had been artificial, and the girl detected this at once.

Edith was really curious to see Gabriel—the man whom her dead uncle had desired her to marry. She made no display of her feelings, for her eyes were turned resolutely towards the fire. Certainly he had one of the richest, pleasantest voices that Edith had ever heard, and there was a genuine ring in his laughter that showed that it came from the heart. His voice had made just a slight impression upon Edith, and she was afraid lest when her eyes fell upon him this favourable idea of him would vanish.

"Why, Jack, you have grown out of all knowledge!" said Gabriel. "I declare I should not have known you if I had met you in the street. Hallo, May, my blue-eyed sister! What have you been doing all the time I have been away? How many sweethearts have you got?"

"Only George," replied May, and there was a general laugh, in which the blushing girl joined.

"Oh, so you have gone and engaged to that rascal, as I prognosticated you would?" said Gabriel, who seemed in the best of spirits. "So I have arrived home in time for the wedding?"

"The day is not yet fixed," replied Mr. Thorne; and then Edith heard him say in a penetrating whisper, "Your cousin Edith is here."

Still she did not look round, although she heard Gabriel advance towards her.

He was certainly struck with the girl's beauty, and, having her eyes turned away, she gave him a good opportunity to gaze at her face without being impertinent.

The girl seemed quite unconscious of his presence, and he had plenty of time to admire her oval face, her white forehead, and dark brown hair.

She wore a velvet dress, which fitted her like a glove, and Gabriel got such a glimpse of the cosy morocco slippers and grey stockings.

"Now, sir, when you have done looking," thought Edith.

"So this is Edith?" said Gabriel, speaking of the girl as though she was a rare work of art; and so she was compelled to look up, and their eyes met.

She saw a man who was quite six feet high, with a proportionate breadth of shoulders, thick, curly, crispy, chestnut-coloured hair, and earnest, deep-set eyes.

He was a magnificent specimen of manhood; but perhaps the chin was too massive and bull-dog looking.

Edith's first glance told her that he had a will equally as strong as her own.

"If I were a soldier," thought Edith, "I should like to follow such a captain. It would be either death or victory with him. He isn't positively ugly."

"So you have heard of my existence?" observed Edith, as he took her hand and held it for a moment.

Then before she could divine the Captain's intention he bent down and kissed her on the cheek with his moustached lips—a proceeding that brought the bright angry blush to her face, and she gave him a look that he never forgot.

A glow came into her face, and a frown on her usually smooth brow that was positively dangerous.

"A cousin's privilege," pleaded Gabriel. He was very sorry he had made the girl angry with him, but he did not regret having stolen the kiss.

"I am not used to provincial manners," replied Edith, disdainfully, as she wiped the cheek he had kissed with a lace pocket-handkerchief, as though he had left some black mark there.

"I had no intention of offending you, Edith," said Gabriel, quite contritely. "But you must remember that this is my home-coming, and I am a little excited."

Gabriel could not tell if the girl had forgiven him or not, for she neither smiled or frowned, but she seemed to regard him as some large, clumsy curiosity.

In her own mind she felt more reconciled to Berner's End now Gabriel had appeared, for women are always just a little interested in a brave officer, and it was evident he was no feather-bed soldier.

He related some of his stirring adventures, much against his will; but the boys insisted upon it, and he good-naturedly complied with their request.

Jack was very much annoyed that he did not have his uniform on, and Will was anxious to know how many war-medals he would have.

It was noticeable to Edith that he never brought himself prominently forward, and always preferred to talk of the deeds of others rather than his own.

It was wonderful to see how the lawyer's hard features would relax as he listened to his eldest son's voice; and it was evident to Edith that Gabriel was his favourite.

More than once Gabriel's eye wandered to his cousin's face, and Edith was not unconscious of this.

Edith watched him as he talked, watched intently, although she could not always see the expression of his face, for he was sitting in a very dark corner of the room.

At length Edith rose, and declared her intention of going to bed, long before the others had any idea of doing such a thing.

It was not that the girl was really fatigued, for she was in vigorous health, but she wanted to show her utter indifference to Gabriel by going off in the middle of one of his most interesting stories.

If Gabriel was annoyed he did not show it, for he went on talking in the same animated way long after she had left them.

Later on in the evening Gabriel and his sister May were alone, and he put this question to her,—

"Have you seen Isidore lately?"

"I have not seen her for some time," said May, speaking in a restrained way that quite startled Gabriel.

"Is there anything the matter, May?" he asked.

"No; only Isidore is travelling in France with her father," returned May.

CHAPTER II.

It was market day at Berner's End, and at a very early hour Edith was aroused from her slumber by the bleating of sheep, the grunting of pigs, and loud, hoarse shouts of drivers. She turned lazily, and closed her eyes, and tried to go to sleep

again, but found this impossible, for the din grew louder every moment, and the cattle, men, and horses seemed to delight in making all the noise they could, while country carts, crammed to their utmost capacity, went creaking and groaning by.

The sun came through the venetian blind, making long lines of light on the wall, and Edith came to the conclusion that she had much better get up than remain in bed listening to the discordant sounds. It was very annoying, for it seemed to her that she had only been asleep an hour or two. She went to the window and looked out, to see a drove of bullocks being driven by, but followed by a driver, who probed the hindmost animal in the ribs with his stick. They were putting up the sign-post at the "Blue Lion," and carpenters were hammering and sawing, and the door of the inn was already opened.

While gazing out of the window she caught sight of Gabriel talking and laughing with a stout looking farmer with a coarse red face. How could he associate with such people, Edith wondered, and then she hastily drew back, for Gabriel looked up.

Edith didn't see much of Gabriel on that day. He had gone to call on old friends, she was told. Gabriel was a great favourite in the town, and many miles around. Everyone liked him, for he was so frank and genial, and so full of life and animation. The family were anxious to know what Edith thought of Gabriel, and were all surprised and hurt at her indifference.

It was Mrs. Thorne's opinion that her eldest son was simply irresistible, and felt inclined to lose her temper when Edith said, "He would do very well if he was not so big and clumsy. I am not a good judge in weight, but I think he must be nearly fourteen stone!"

"You are very critical, my dear," said Mrs. Thorne, trying to hide her anger by giving a sickly kind of smile.

"What a horrid noise there was this morning," said Edith. "I was awakened at daybreak by the most awful din I have ever heard in my life. Can you not put me into another room?"

Mrs. Thorne was quite astonished at this request, and if it had been any other person but Edith would have said something more truthful than pleasant. She had given the girl the best room in the house, had gone to the expense of buying a new carpet and curtains, and still she did not seem satisfied.

Edith had come to Berner's End with the intention of hating Gabriel, but she did not find it so easy to carry out as she had thought. Gradually, in spite of all her struggles, a liking for him, nearly approaching love, came into her heart. She made this discovery one day when they were alone in the garden together, and left him abruptly, much to his surprise. She had no desire that he should discover the state of her feelings, and she was greatly afraid that her face might betray her at that moment.

In spite of all Mrs. Thorne's efforts to keep matters secret, Edith had heard in some way of Gabriel's engagement with Isidore, and she was more than ever determined from that moment not to marry Gabriel. She was in ignorance as to what he intended to do; quite in the dark as to whether he desired to throw Isidore over or not. "If he does throw her over," thought Edith, "it will only be because he wishes to gain possession of Uncle Richard's money, and he will marry me just because he is forced to do so."

She had fully determined if he ever did ask her to marry him, that her answer would be an emphatic "No."

It was observed by everybody that Edith

became more capricious and exacting every day, and the person she delighted to tease and annoy the most was Gabriel. Her nature seemed as changeable as the most variable day in April. One moment she would be in the sweetest and best of tempers, and at another her eyes would flash, and she would say the most bitter, cutting, and sarcastic things.

Edith despised and disliked everyone in the lawyer's household save Gabriel, and she fully resolved to quit the place immediately she could force him to give up all idea of marrying her. Then she would be free, and be able to do just as she liked. But would Gabriel give up the money? Such a thing was hardly possible.

"If he does marry," thought Edith, "his married life will be a most unpleasant one."

It is very difficult to analyse Gabriel Thorne's feelings in regard to that little black-eyed cousin of his. She was so hard to understand, so quick-tempered, impetuous, and unreasonable. There was often no reason to expect foul weather, when suddenly the smile would vanish from her lips, and she would turn upon him like the little demon she was. Sometimes she would be so amiable and pleasant that he began quite to care for her, and compared Isidore with her to the latter's disparagement, then the ominous frown would appear and he seemed to hate her.

"I should take a great pride in breaking you in, my proud little cousin," muttered Gabriel, looking after her one afternoon as she hurried away from him in one of her tempers, just because Gabrielle had refused to climb up a tall cliff, at the risk of life and limb, to pick her a flower. She had left him with the words "contemptible coward," on her red scornful lips, an accusation at which he could afford to laugh.

"Yes, my dear little cousin, I would surely break you in if I were to marry you," he said again, as he lit his pipe. He spoke of her just as he would have spoken of some vicious horse that required both whip and spur.

As for Edith, she went straight home and told Mrs. Thorne her opinion of her son, much to that lady's indignation. Once again an angry word was on her lips, but she restrained herself on receiving a warning look from her husband.

"But, my dear, you could not expect a man with common sense to risk his neck for the sake of a flower!" said Mrs. Thorne. "As for you calling him a coward, it is ridiculous of you, knowing, as you do, how bravely he fought for his country."

"No doubt he fought because he couldn't help himself," and then she went to the piano and began to play and sing. While thus engaged, Gabriel came leisurely into the room and went to the piano, and began to turn over the music for her. At this, she rose and hurried out of the room, giving him a contemptuous glance.

Gabriel could not help feeling interested in her, for he had never seen a girl like her before. He had often told her that he did not approve of her conduct at all times, but she had seemed quite indifferent to his words.

Gabriel was surprised at her many accomplishments. She could swim, hunt, row, and fence, and Gabriel had once laughingly called her a modern Amazon.

After his refusal to pluck the flowers for her, Edith avoided him on all occasions when possible, and would always look at him with that contemptuous curl of the upper lip. At first he laughed and then he became annoyed. To a man of his temperament her treatment was unbearable, so he went up to her at last.

"What a dreadful temper you have,

Edith? I really think you take the greatest delight in driving me mad. You are the most tormenting girl I have ever seen."

"You are very complimentary, Mr. Gabriel Thorne," said Edith, pretending not to see his outstretched hand. "I think you might be more guarded in your language to a lady."

"But you are so unreasonable, so ready to show your temper when there is no cause for it."

"Your brother Jack would not speak in this way," said Edith; "and I am sure if I had asked him to fetch me that flower he would not have refused."

"Jack is only a lad, and is much lighter than I am," explained Gabriel, "and could climb up the cliffs much easier than I can."

The end of it was that Gabriel went out and soon returned with the identical flower he and Edith had quarrelled about. He did not think it necessary to tell her, however, that he had paid a young and active boy sixpence to pluck it for him. Gabriel was not a madman, and he knew that it would have been certain death to climb this cliff.

On presenting Edith with the flower there was such a look of insolent triumph in her bright dark eyes, such a "have-to-do-as-I-tell-you" expression on her face, that Captain Thorne half regretted having brought it to her.

She had the advantage of him in one way, for although her temper was a quick one she was slow to forget; but Gabriel was quick-tempered too, but then his passion was soon over.

May watched these continued quarrels and making-up with dismay, for she could not help thinking that it would end by their hating each other. How she wished Isidore would return from France.

There could be no doubt that Edith was gaining a strong influence over Gabriel day by day and hour by hour. There was a witchery in her manner and a magic in her glance that bound Gabriel as if by a spell. She was winning him slowly and surely from Isidore, fiercely as he struggled against it. His father had told him the proviso in his uncle's will, and he had seemed very indignant, but Mr. Thorne believed that he would be soon reconciled.

As her power increased, Edith became more tyrannical and wilful, and Gabriel found it difficult to gratify all her caprices. He would make a great show of resistance at first, but in her insistence his opposition would melt away like snow before sunshine.

It was wonderful how ingenious Edith was in finding some trivial vexations thing for him to do, and the whole family would be on the girl's side, and declare that it was only her pretty way to torment the gallant soldier out of his life.

Gabriel often knew that he was making a fool of himself, but in spite of this he would do her bidding just for the sake of winning a smile from those coral lips.

They had danced together at the ball at the Town Hall, they had attended several garden parties, and had gone for long drives. Mr. Thorne and his family always contrived that they should be often alone. Occasionally Gabriel would reproach himself for his flirtation with Edith when he thought of Isidore; then he would dismiss the subject with a smile, trying to persuade himself that it was all nonsense after all.

He could not write to Isidore for he did not know in what part of France she was in.

Edith's life was much brighter than it ever was before, although she did live in a dull provincial town; but it must be confessed that time passed very heavily on her hands when Gabriel Thorne was not near her.

The girl was growing more beautiful, and in spite of her fierce, rebellious temper, everyone in the house began to like her, for there was a charm in her manner that none could resist, and she knew that, however she offended, she had only to smile to be forgiven.

May was the last to surrender, but she at length was compelled to haul down her flag, and to own that she was growing very fond of her wicked little cousin.

"Not that she was disloyal to Isidore in any way for she still hoped that Gabriel would marry her."

If she had not been afraid that Gabriel would break her heart, she would just as soon have had Edith for a sister-in-law.

One warm afternoon Gabriel found Edith in her little sitting-room that overlooked the smooth-kept lawn.

He had been to London a couple of days, and, quite taken by surprise, the girl flushed up to the roots of her dark brown hair, much to her annoyance, for she did not wish him to see how pleased she was at his return.

But there is a look that comes in the eyes sometimes, an expression that comes to the face on occasions which go far to explain what is passing in the mind.

"Can it be that she is really fond of me?" Gabriel asked himself, as he took out something from his pocket, and handed it to his cousin, saying as he did so,—

"A present for you, Edith."

The girl took the little packet with murmured words of thanks.

It was not so much the present she cared about as the fact that he had thought of her.

With a true woman, it is not the value of the article given that she cares about. It may be only a simple little flower, or some pretty, inexpensive book; but, if she is young, generous, and innocent, she will value it all the more for its simplicity.

One large, costly present will not have half the effect in a woman's heart as little trifling articles frequently given.

The costly thing shows that she was thought of once, the little trifles that she is constantly in the mind.

She looked up at Gabriel's face as she spoke, and then down at the little packet that was wrapped round with brown paper.

What was the piece of oblong paper outside the little packet? It was a photograph; and he had doubtless presented her with a portrait of himself, the conceited fellow!

She turned it over, and saw a woman's face, and under it was writing.

"You have given me this by mistake," said Edith, handing him back the photograph, and retaining the present.

And, with a blush like a foolish school-girl, Gabriel took it, and hurried out of the room to hide his confusion.

"He loves Isidore still!" Edith told herself, looking after him till he closed the door.

This thought seemed an unpleasant one to Edith, for she displayed no curiosity to unfasten the little packet she still held in her hand, but stood near the open window with a half angry, half hurt expression on the proud, dark, sensitive face.

CHAPTER III.

THERE was war to the knife between Gabriel and Edith now, and there now seemed no chance of it ever being otherwise.

To tell the truth, Edith was furiously jealous ever since she had seen the photograph.

She certainly seemed very eccentric to Gabriel, for he was quite unconscious of having committed any offence.

There is no doubt that she loved him very dearly; and it seemed hard to her that she could get no affection in return from the only person she had ever cared about.

It must be confessed that she did not bear her sorrow with sweet maidenly dignity and resignation.

She had the same old wilful spirit as when she had shrieked and struck at the garret door with her clenched hands when a child—the same indomitable will that had made her defy her Uncle Richard, that had made her never deign to ask for mercy or pardon at his hands.

If she was defiant and reckless she kept her one great secret well, and no one knew how she fretted when once in her room, with the door securely locked. Then she would give way to tears and useless fits of temper.

Up till now she had only to place her head on the pillow to fall asleep; but now she was wide-awake half the night, and she could not understand it.

There was a heavy pain at her heart that kept her in a state of constant torment, and she walked up and down the room in the night, her bare feet making no sound.

When she rose in the morning she would have a headache, and be quite unrefreshed; but no one suspected what it cost her to appear happy and contented, and Edith told herself that nobody cared.

Gabriel and Edith always avoided each other now, and the young man had been heard to declare that he quite believed that she was going mad, for her conduct was quite unaccountable to him.

So high were her spirits at times that they seemed unnatural. Her eyes were strangely bright, and she always felt in a burning fever.

At length she made herself so thoroughly disliked by the servants that they all gave warning, saying that they were not slaves to be ordered about by Miss Edith in such a way, and would not put up with it.

It seemed strange that a girl of Edith's age should so completely turn a house topsy-turvy, but she did; and they all wondered how Uncle Richard had put up with her so long.

Edith was sitting on a bench close under the library window one evening when she heard Mr. Thorne and Gabriel talking together, and found herself to be the subject of their conversation.

"I tell you, father," said Gabriel, most emphatically, "that Edith is the greatest vixen I've ever seen. Her sarcastic remarks bite into one's heart like aquafortis on steel. She deliberately picks out one's weak points and holds them up to ridicule, and, in short, is the worst tempered, most vindictive, and mischievous little plague I ever met, and it would be a good riddance to get her out of the house. We shall never have any peace or quietness till she has gone!"

Having delivered himself of this scathing denouncement of Edith, Gabriel relapsed into silence, and striking a match lit his pipe. If he could only have seen poor little Edith at that moment, he might have regretted being so unsparing in his criticisms of her conduct. Certainly the girl deserved some punishment for her stiff-necked pride and obstinacy, but not to drink such a bitter draught as this.

To be spoken of in such a fierce, resentful way, to know that Gabriel desired her absence, was a cruel knowledge, and to think that he could smoke so quietly after giving utterance to such words!

After the match had been struck silence reigned in the room, but without the wind rustled gently the leaves and fluttered the little feather in Edith's hat.

The girl sat there for some time, although

since she had heard Gabriel's harsh opinion of her the evening air sent a strange, icy chill to her heart, but she dare not enter the house lest her pale, quivering, tear-stained face might provoke inquiry.

Gabriel should never know that she had overheard the conversation in the library; she would be careful that he should not guess how much she had felt then.

She remained out in the garden, and the stars grew brighter in the sky; the lamp had been lighted in the library and the windows shut down.

"I will go away, and Gabriel shall never see my face again!" the girl whispered to herself, and then she rose to her feet and went indoors.

Edith was quite cool and collected when she entered the sitting-room, and no one had the slightest suspicion what was passing in her mind; but it was noticeable that she made herself very agreeable that evening.

She spoke to every one present, had an appreciative smile for the old lawyer, played draughts with Jack, and when Gabriel asked her to sing went to the piano at once. She had made up her mind that this was to be the last evening she would spend amongst them, and therefore she wished all of them to remember her at her best.

Since Gabriel had regarded her in the light of an intruder she would go away, taking the utmost precaution to prevent them tracking her out. She doubted much if they would desire to do so; but it was safer to frustrate an attempt to discover her whereabouts.

She sang a pathetic song that evening, and rendered it so well that it brought tears into the eyes of those who heard it, and echoed in their ears when she no longer lived under that roof.

It was a farewell song, a valedictory address to them all, although they knew it not, and Gabriel often remembered the look in that fair face when she bade him good-night.

There was something new and strange in her manner that he could not quite make out. It puzzled him for a few short hours, and then the pain in those dark, expressive eyes was explained.

Impulsively he bent down and kissed her white brow and she did not resist it, but giving him a warm pressure, passed slowly out of the room.

Edith did not go to bed, although she felt tired and weary, but seating herself at a table began to write a letter.

"MY DEAR COUSIN GABRIEL,—In all probability this is the only letter I shall ever write to you, and you will not be able to answer it, for when you read it I shall have left the shelter of your father's roof. You have all been kind to me, more considerate than I deserved, and I thank you all very much.

"I have a difficult task to explain myself in my present state of mind, but I wish you to understand, Gabriel, that it is I who refuse to marry you; it is I who refuse to be coerced into a false and irrevocable step.

"I will not have my future arranged for me by my dead uncle; and therefore, under the conditions of the will, by rejecting you I lose all claim to the property.

"With a fervent wish that the money will bring you every happiness, I say adieu, trusting that you will speak and think kindly of me sometimes. "EORTH."

There were tears in her eyes when she put down her pen with a long-drawn sigh of relief, but she took care that they did not fall upon the letter.

"I have made no sacrifice," she said to herself; "no sacrifice at all in giving the money to the man I love!"

Scarcely such a woman was capable of high and noble things!

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Gabriel perused Edith's letter he was greatly surprised at its contents, and so were all the family when he read it to them. That the girl should throw over Gabriel in this way was almost inconceivable to Mrs. Thorne, who considered her son to be the most irresistible of men. As to Mr. Thorne, he was quite as much astonished as his wife, but in a different degree. There was nothing very peculiar in a woman being indifferent to a particular young man, but there was something very strange in a woman giving up her share of a large fortune, and Mr. Thorne could not make this out at all.

Since Gabriel had not liked the idea of marrying Edith, perhaps things had turned out for the best, Mr. Thorne told himself. She had renounced the property; Gabriel, therefore, would have all the money. The lawyer was delighted, but Gabriel looked very grave as he folded up the letter.

May was very pleased that Edith had left them, for she now believed that her brother would now think more of Isidore. Little did Miss May think how she was throwing away her sympathy on a most undeserving object, for Isidore was not the kind of girl to break her heart over any one.

"Well, my dear Gabriel!" cried Mr. Thorne, giving him a playful tap on the back. "So everything has come right. You now have a right to all your Uncle Richard's money without being obliged to marry Edith! Perhaps it is as well as it is, for she had a very nasty temper, nice as she could be at times."

"I am very sorry that she should have given up the money," replied Gabriel, crumbling up the letter in his hand.

"Hilloah, Gabriel, be careful," cried Mr. Thorne, and he turned very white. "Do you see what you are doing?"

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Gabriel.

"Don't you know that the letter you hold in your hand is a very valuable document?" said Mr. Thorne. "Give it to me, Gabriel, and I'll have a sixpenny stamp put upon it. If you destroy that letter all would be lost, for Edith might then come back and alter her mind."

Gabriel Thorne allowed his father to take the letter, and he began to smooth it out, while Gabriel glanced intently at the fire, apparently in deep thought. After a time he rose from his chair, with the look of a man who had come to a sudden determination. Uncle Richard's money was very acceptable to the young man, but he did not like to think of Edith being deprived of it.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Thorne, anxiously, for he saw the expression of determination in his son's face, and was afraid that he was about to commit some Quixotic act.

"I'm going to find Edith," replied Gabriel, very quietly.

"What for?"

"I wish to explain to her that I must give up the money, not her," said Gabriel Thorne. "It would be cruel to allow Edith to make such a sacrifice, cowardly to let a young girl like her struggle with the world."

"You are mad, Gabriel!" said Mr. Thorne. "Surely you will not be such an idiot as to resign your position?"

"Call me what you like, my mind is made up," replied Gabriel, as he put on his hat and coat. "Edith cannot get a living. She has not been brought up with the idea of labour, and the struggle for bread would absolutely break her heart."

"The girl is strong and self-reliant, and there is no danger of her sinking!" declared the lawyer. "Take my advice, my dear Gabriel, and accept the money."

But Gabriel would not be guided by his father in this matter, and hurriedly left the house; but after he had walked half-way down the High-street stopped suddenly. How was he to trace Edith, who would purposely do all in her power to put him off the scent? Luckily for Gabriel the people of Berners End were very early risers, and happening to meet Isaac Reed, the young chemist, he accidentally mentioned that he had seen Edith, who had appeared to be in a great hurry.

"She would hardly speak to me," said Isaac Reed, in conclusion. "I hope, Gabriel, that I have done nothing to offend Miss Edith?"

"Probably she was in a hurry to catch a train," observed Gabriel, quickly. "You must know that Edith left us most unexpectedly this morning."

Gabriel left the chemist abruptly, and hurried to the station. He was well-acquainted with the ticket clerk, who was looking up the office, for there would be no train for an hour.

"I saw a lady answering your description this morning," said the clerk.

"Did she take a ticket?"

"Yes."

"Up or down?"

"At first she asked for a ticket for Charing Cross; but before I could give it to her she altered her mind and said Endlethorpe."

"Thank you," said Gabriel, very much relieved in his mind, for it would be much easier to find Edith at Endlethorpe than in great, large, overcrowded London. Endlethorpe, he thought, as he retraced his steps. "That is the place where she lived with Uncle Richard! Probably she has some friends there!"

He went back home and packed his portmanteau, and as he was locking it his sister May came into the room.

"So you are going in search of Edith?" she asked.

"Yes, the train will leave here in half-an-hour."

"If Isidore should happen to write shall I send on the letter to you?" asked May, timidly.

"You can send on my letters to the Railway Hotel, Endlethorpe," replied Gabriel, and it seemed so strange to May that he should have to be reminded of Isidore's existence. It was not like this of old.

On his arrival at Endlethorpe the first thing Gabriel did was to order dinner, for he had had nothing inside his lips that day. He was tolerably certain now that he would find Edith, so did not hurry himself, but enjoyed his meal like a sensible man. Then, as darkness was beginning to fall upon the earth, he walked in the direction of his uncle's house. He found the place very soon, but saw no lights in any of the windows. To all appearance it was quite deserted, but on ringing the bell very loudly he heard the sound of footsteps in the passage, and then the door was opened by an old and feeble woman.

"I have reason to believe that Miss Edith Thorne has been here?" said Gabriel. It was one of his characteristics that he never beat about the bush.

"She has been here, sir," said the old woman. She manifested no surprise, and evidently expected a visitor. Probably Edith had told her that someone might call.

"Are you quite sure she is not here now?" asked Gabriel, quite sharply.

"No, she left here an hour ago," replied the old woman, and now Gabriel reproached himself for having delayed a moment.

"Do you know where she has gone to?" was the next question that Gabriel asked.

"No, sir!" replied the woman, and

Gabriel saw that she had received instructions.

"What was Miss Edith's object in coming here? And why did she remain only such a short time?" asked Gabriel, not liking to own himself beaten.

"I am not at liberty to tell," replied Mrs. Crisp; and seeing that he could get nothing further from the old woman he returned to his hotel.

On the following morning he received a letter from his sister, and a very long one it was.

"MY DEAR GABRIEL—I have just heard of Isidore, through a mutual friend, and I find that she has returned from France quite a month, and consequently must be aware of your arrival in England. I cannot understand her reason for not writing to you, and her conduct seems very extraordinary to me, to say the least."

"I hardly like to repeat what I have been told; but still it would be wrong in me to keep back anything from you; so I hope you will forgive me for what I am going to say. I have heard sinister rumours regarding Isidore, rumours that I would not pay any attention to but for one reason—her long inexplicable silence."

"It is said, my dear brother—upon what foundation I cannot tell—that Isidore has a new sweetheart, a man of wealth, and that she has thrown you over for him. I hope you will forgive me if the news I send is not reliable; but you can find out as to its truth by going to Falconbridge."

It is hardly necessary to tell the reader that Gabriel took his sister's advice.

His pursuit of Edith was given up, and he at once hastened to Falconbridge.

He tried to persuade himself that there was not a word of truth in what May had heard; but he was marvellously pale, notwithstanding all his incredulity.

He had never until then contemplated the possibility of Isidore playing him false, and he wondered greatly how this scandal had arisen concerning the woman whom he regarded as his future wife.

He remembered the last interview he had with her, the promise she had made him, and the kiss she had given him at parting.

He was old enough to know the change that a few months will make in a woman's heart.

The hedges were bare and leafless as he had seen them a year ago; and the ponds were frozen over just as they had been when Gabriel had asked Isidore to be his wife.

He could hardly believe, as he walked along the familiar lane, that he had been away so long.

Turning an abrupt corner in the lane, Gabriel Thorne came in view of a small old-fashioned cottage, that stood in a small flower-garden.

He stopped suddenly to look at the little place, his heart beating a great deal more quickly than it had ever done in the battlefield. A cool chill ran through his frame; a strange dread had fallen upon him. He felt faint and unwell.

"I am a fool!" he told himself. "A moment ago I was gay and light-hearted, and now I am as sad as I can be."

With an attempt at a laugh Gabriel Thorne hurried forward. Passing through the rustic garden-gate he knocked at the door which was immediately opened by a pretty servant-girl, who was smartly dressed.

"Is Miss Isidore at home?" he asked, in a voice that trembled slightly.

"Miss Isidore at home, sir?" said the servant, who was a stranger to Gabriel Thorne. "Miss Isidore at home! Why, she has gone to get married! Why, what is the matter? Are you ill, sir?"

It was no wonder that the girl asked this question, for Gabriel Thorne stood at the porch, white and ghastly, his eyes fixed upon her face despairingly.

"Are you ill?" repeated the girl, kindly. "Shall I get you a glass of water?"

At this moment the sound of joy bells broke out on the air, but they had no joyous ring for poor Gabriel Thorne, for were they not the death-knell of all his hopes?

They had one effect upon Gabriel Thorne. The sound of the bells aroused him from the stupor into which the servant's words had caused him to fall.

"I'll stop the wedding!" he cried.

He rushed down the garden path at headlong speed, while the servant looked after him in utmost surprise.

Gabriel knew the way to the church, had he not been guided by the sound of the bells. It was the very church where he had thought of marrying—the very bells he heard were those which might have proclaimed his own wedding!

Louder grew the bells, mocking him, as it were, with their iron tongues. The blue sky, the green fields, the keen winter air had no longer any attractions for him. He saw nothing as he walked along, the sound of the wedding-bells ringing in his ears. Only one thing he hoped for, and that was that he should arrive before the wedding had taken place.

Gabriel Thorne was confident of one thing. Treachery had been at work! Someone had been traducing him to Isidore, and she, believing what she had been told, had consented to the marriage! It was her aunt that had done this, Gabriel felt sure. He saw her object now in putting off her marriage for a year.

Hurrying along with clouded brow and bent head, Gabriel Thorne came in contact with a pedestrian coming the opposite way.

"Why don't you look where you are going?" said a voice. "Why," added the new-comer in a more pleasant voice. "Let me congratulate you on your safe return!" and he seized Gabriel by the hand.

"I wish that I had been slain on the battlefield," said Gabriel Thorne, bitterly.

"Nonsense, Gabriel," said his friend, still retaining his hand.

"Let me go, or I shall be too late," said Gabriel, savagely—so savagely that Johnson started back.

"This is a nice way to treat a friend!" said Johnson, as Gabriel darted down the road. "How wild and ill he looked! I have it! He has heard of Isidore's wedding!"

Now the church tower came into view through the tall elms, and Gabriel could see the thrilling, palpitating bells through the coupe window as they swung to and fro.

A crowd of curious persons were gathered round the church gate; then there was a stir amongst the crowd, and necks were eagerly craned, and all eyes looked in one direction; then some people left the church, and then the bride appeared.

She was fairer than ever in her bridal dress in Gabriel's eyes, and a pain shot through the young man's heart; but he drew himself up in a soldierly way, as she came slowly along, quite unconscious that her old lover was there.

Isidore seemed gloriously happy—so happy, in fact, that Gabriel could scarcely endure the sight of the treacherous woman. Not once did Gabriel look at the bridegroom; he had only eyes for the bride.

How quickly the blood rushed from Isidore's face, leaving it as white as the veil that partly concealed it from view when she caught sight of Gabriel,

She was one of those who could not live on a memory. She had loved Gabriel when near and forgotten him when far away, and now he had returned her old affection for him was gaining the ascendancy.

She was a cowardly little woman, and trembled from head to foot, and leaned heavily on her husband's arm as Gabriel whispered in her ear,—

"I have come to remind you of your broken promise!"

He said no more, having no opportunity; but his words had the effect of sending the blood back to her face.

He followed Isidore's movements with a curiously intense gaze, not noticing that his strange manner was attracting some attention.

Isidore was very glad to sit down in the carriage, for her limbs trembled, and she felt very faint. Her husband was impressed with the sudden change in her manner, for the smile had gone from her lips; but he little guessed the real cause of her pre-occupation.

Isidore was thinking to herself, "Oh, why did he come too late?"

The stern, un pitying glance of the man she had so wronged, the accusing voice, she would remember as long as her life would last.

It had seemed such a long time waiting for him, and now he had appeared on her wedding-day, of all others.

Gabriel stood at the gate until the carriage drove away. But Isidore never once looked in his direction, although she knew instinctively that his eyes were fixed upon her.

The last he saw of her she was looking down at the bouquet she was holding in her trembling hand, and her husband was charmed by her coyness.

So disturbed was Gabriel that he went into the quiet churchyard, and sat down to rest. The sexton, who was cutting the grass, came up to him, and, with an eye to the main chance, thinking that he had lost someone recently from the grief expressed on his face, asked if he could be of any assistance to him in finding out the grave he wanted.

Without condescending to reply Gabriel rose and hurried away, muttering to himself,—

"I can have no peace even here."

It was the first great disappointment, and his suffering was keen and bitter.

It is doubtful if Gabriel would have been happy if he had married Isidore, for she was one of those women who have only their beauty to recommend them.

When the eyes grow less bright, and their fair complexions vanish, all love for them passes away.

But for the moment sorrow was supreme, and reason and commonsense held no longer possession of Gabriel's mind.

Driven from the churchyard Gabriel was utterly careless as to which direction he took. He groped his way almost like a blind man, and people turned round to look after him, quite startled and shocked by his white face; but he heeded them not, being perhaps quite unconscious that there was anyone about to see him.

Gabriel was very glad when the clangour of the bells ceased; but the silence was very painful to him too.

He did not feel at all revengeful against Isidore; he was grieved to find her false, that was all.

Had he escaped death on the battle-field while other men died, with women with true and faithful hearts waiting for them at home!

Quite unconsciously Gabriel had taken the most picturesque path in the neighbourhood. All that was wanted to make

the place beautiful was summer air and summer sunshine.

To his right was an ivy-covered wall, and behind that wall was a garden, much higher than the road; and anyone in the before-mentioned garden could look over the wall and down into the road if desiring to do so. Some one was looking over the wall—a young dark-faced girl, who was much surprised to see Gabriel. She was too much astonished to move hand or foot, and remained rooted to the spot.

If Gabriel Thorne had only taken the trouble to look up, he would have seen his cousin Edith, but he was too much engrossed in his own sad thoughts to do this, so passed on quite unconscious of her proximity.

Edith could not help noticing how pale and careworn he looked, and for one moment told herself that he had come in search of her. The next instant she reproached herself for her vain folly. Surely his coming there must be quite an accident; for if he had been in pursuit of her he would have been much more watchful.

Edith felt very much annoyed with herself in taking such an interest in Gabriel. The sudden knowledge that she was capable of such tender weakness had an overwhelming effect upon her.

She was ashamed of this foolish affection, this touch of humanity, and had fought against her great love for Gabriel, but in vain. If her love for Gabriel was folly, the folly had taken such a deep root in her heart that it was quite impossible to eradicate it. Of a warm and impulsive nature, Edith loved and hated with equal ardour.

Edith had taken refuge in the house of an old married actor who had taught her elocution. Being tolerably successful, he had taken a little cottage in the centre of his district, for he played at little country towns within a radius of twenty miles of his home. Sometimes he would remain away from home for a week, and would return on the Saturday morning.

Edith had visited the actor's family when her uncle was alive, and had spent many pleasant hours there.

Dick Denmead had always declared that Edith would make her fortune on the stage, and he had gone so far as to declare that he would obtain her an engagement after he had given her some instruction.

On leaving the Thornes, Edith had resolved to put Mr. Denmead to the test, and to find out if he meant what he said, or only desired to pay her a meaningless compliment. Not that she cared to appear on the stage. Far from it; but it occurred to her that she could earn more money by that than any other way.

She had often told Mr. Denmead that she hated the idea of becoming an actress; but he always replied that he was sure the excitement would be congenial to her.

The old actor was delighted to see Edith, and declared that if she only studied hard for three months, he would be sure to get her on the boards.

They discussed ways and means, and to prove his confidence in her abilities, offered to give her board and lodging, and she was to pay him when her salary became large enough.

CHAPTER V.

It was many days before Gabriel appeared at Berner's End, and when his good little sister May saw his face she at once guessed what had happened. Most people would have allowed their curiosity to gain the ascendancy, and have questioned him, but May was not one of those. She saw at once that Gabriel had suffered, and had no desire to open the wound that would take so long healing. Gabriel understood his sister, and thanked her for her consideration.

It was a long time before Gabriel asked if anything had been heard of Edith. To tell the truth, Gabriel missed Edith, and so did May, now that she had found Isidore to be such a little traitress.

If Edith had been there to quarrel with Gabriel, perhaps she would have been able to have aroused him from the strange lethargy that was creeping over him. Friends told him that he was getting thinner, but he only laughed; but the laugh he gave had not the same old ring about it, and there were many who were sorry to hear it, and wondered what had come over Gabriel.

As yet Gabriel had not touched a farthing of Uncle Richard's money, and he had made up his mind that he would not do so until Edith was found.

As time went on Gabriel contrasted Edith and Isidore, and to the latter's disadvantage too. Isidore was soft and gentle in manner, and Gabriel could not once recall having seen her in a temper. She was one of those people who appear kind and amiable to every one, but who can be cruel and treacherous when they like. For all her winning ways, Isidore had a deceitful heart, or she would never have played false to Gabriel.

Edith had a most impulsive temper, but she was as true as steel.

Edith always said what she meant, and Gabriel knew instinctively that if she once gave her heart that she would never change.

If it had not been for Isidore things would have turned out differently, Gabriel told himself. He would have been more lenient to Edith, and in all probability they would have ended by marrying.

Gabriel's leave had expired, and he had to return to his regiment and take up his quarters at a dull garrison town. He would have preferred to go out to some war, where there was a good chance of being killed; but everything was so wretchedly peaceful just then, and he saw that he must live on.

His brother officers found him a changed man. They believed him to be surly when he was only sad, and he gradually became unpopular—he who was formerly the most sociable of men. The soldiers, too, began to dislike him, for he was very stern, and had become a very strict disciplinarian. His men became smarter, and were on the alert, and this was noticed by all.

We do not mean to imply that Gabriel was unjust, but he was a great deal more critical and inclined to find fault than formerly, and did not spend so many hours in the billiard-room or at the card-table.

He seemed to be studying hard and even to be overworking himself, but he did not do himself nearly the same harm by his useful occupations as his more dissipated comrades. Gabriel found that hard work was the best thing for him, since the mental effort absorbed his attention, and made him oblivious of the past for the time being.

He had never realised before that he had any particular talent, but now he was surprised to find that he had a clearer brain than he thought. Other people were just as much surprised as himself, and everyone declared that Gabriel had made up his mind to get on in the world. It was the general belief that Gabriel had become ambitious, and as an ambitious man is never liked, he was very much shunned. It seemed strange to most of his friends that he should work so hard after having passed his examination.

"Gabriel used to be a good fellow once," was the verdict of everyone, "but he has changed into a surly, unsociable brute!"

Nobody knew of his sorrow, and perhaps would not have sympathised with him if they had.

There was one young fellow who still attached himself to Gabriel, and this was Charles Pagot. He owed Gabriel a debt of gratitude, for when wounded Gabriel had carried him out of reach of the enemy's fire.

"By Jove!" he would often say, when telling the story of Gabriel's bravery; "it was very lucky for me that I am a little dwarf of a man, or Gabriel would never have been able to carry me. I always used to envy you big, tall fellows, but now I see it is not always an advantage to be six feet high."

Little Charley Pagot would never hear a word said against Gabriel. If anyone spoke to his hero's disparagement when he was in the room, Charley would give him a bit of his mind; and at length this got to be so well-known that no one mentioned Gabriel's name in his presence.

Charles Pagot could say very nasty things when he liked, and was not a bit afraid of the biggest man in the regiment. Everyone liked and respected Charles Pagot, with his beardless boyish face, and the bluest, finest eyes that ever were seen.

Charley Pagot had noticed the change that had come over Gabriel, but, being a staunch friend, would not own it to anyone. He still admired Gabriel's handsome face, but he could not help regretting that there was not the old warmth and light in it. He was so cold and listless that he repelled all sympathy.

Even though so much changed, Gabriel could not treat Charley as he treated others. This was quite impossible. It is not natural for the thickest mountain of snow to resist the warmth of the sun altogether, and Charley would generally succeed in winning a smile from Gabriel in spite of himself. Charley would sometimes persuade his friend to play a game of billiards, or to go to a little supper.

One day Charley came rushing into Gabriel's room without the least ceremony. He was the most excitable little fellow in the world, and would often take offence where none was meant, and apologise the next moment. He was as sensitive as a schoolgirl about some things.

"Well, now?" said Gabriel, looking up, pen in hand.

"I am afraid I am a confounded nuisance!"

"Not at all," said Gabriel. "Sit down old fellow," but the look on his face gave the denial to his words.

"Well, I've just come to tell you a piece of startling news," observed Charley, in confidential tones.

"I suppose you have come to tell me to put five pounds on a horse that you think will win. No, thank you, my dear boy; you have let me in three times running."

"No, it isn't that, my dear fellow!" said Charley, speaking like someone who had something to tell.

"What is it, then?"

"Well, you know the theatre has been shut up for many months."

"And a good job too," remarked Gabriel. "I fairly believe that the rat-hole will catch light some day and roast and burn a hundred people. The passages are narrow and winding, and it is nearly all wood."

"Why look at the dark side of things, Gabriel?" said Charley. "The barn is going to be opened again, and a new actress is about to come out. According to the bills issued and all local papers she is going to startle the world!"

"So you are still innocent enough to be taken in by puff paragraphs in local papers?" said Gabriel. "Why, Charley, I am surprised at you!"

"I wish you would have a little confidence in human nature," observed Charley, laughingly. "Do you know, old fellow,

that you are growing more gloomy and suspicious every day? Why did you carry me out of the enemy's fire if you do not think life worth living?"

"I sometimes think I did wrong," said Gabriel, and then they both laughed.

"You must come to the theatre," said Charley, seeing his advantage. "You see, old fellow, my old friend Dick Denmead has a *protégée*, and he wishes to have a very full house."

"Then you are fond of actors, and acknowledge them as your friends?"

"Why not?" asked Charley. "They are nice fellows as a rule," and Charley would not leave Gabriel until he had promised to go to the theatre.

Gabriel gave a reluctant consent, and pushed his friend out of the room, then locked his door to prevent further interruption.

Gabriel quite forgot his promise to go to the theatre, when Charley came to remind him of it in the evening.

Great was Charley's horror to find that he was not yet dressed, and heavy was his indignation when Gabriel advised him to look up some other fellow.

"If you do not come you will spoil my evening!" declared Charley, with a look of disappointment in his handsome face.

"How?"

"I shall stop away too."

This humble threat had the desired effect, and Gabriel and Charley went in arm-in-arm.

The theatre was a very dingy place, or, at least, Gabriel thought so, but it was very well filled.

It must be confessed that Mr. Charles Pagot had a poor ear for music, and enjoyed the discordant sounds that came from the orchestra.

It would have been all the same to him if it had been a street-organ, for he found beauty in everything, and had a keen and sensible appreciation of life that Gabriel envied.

Gabriel was very glad when the curtain went up, for then the music ended.

The new actress was certainly very prepossessing, and this created a favourable impression. But it was very doubtful how long the audience would remain in a good humour.

The girl would have passed through the ordeal very well indeed, but for a most unfortunate accident.

Her eyes happened to fall on Gabriel just at the moment he recognised her; and then it was that Edith lost her self-possession, and stopped short in the middle of a speech.

"Go on!" cried the gallery, while those in the pit stamped their feet.

The spell was broken, and Edith went through her part in the greatest confusion, standing in need of the prompter very often.

She never knew how she got through that evening, for she was hissed and jeered at, and when the curtain went down for the last time fainted away.

She was told that her services would no longer be required, and went home to Dick Denmead's house almost broken-hearted.

He tried to console her in every way, telling her she must not be cast down because of one failure.

Gabriel tried to see Edith, but missed her in some way.

In the morning, however, he received a letter from his cousin that quite surprised him.

"Why are you not satisfied?" it ran. "I have resigned the money to you. I changed my name in order that you should not know of my hope of being an actress;

but you have found me out. If you had not come to see me on my first appearance I should not have made a failure, and blaming you for the cause of my ignominy I hate you."

Gabriel read the letter in bewilderment.

She was most unjust and unreasonable because he had been the innocent cause of her failure; and he resolved to see her as soon as he could.

It was certainly very unfortunate that he had gone to the theatre, and he blamed Charley for all the mischief that had been done.

Of late he had often thought of Edith, while Isidore had completely gone from his mind; or, if he did think of her sometimes, it was to congratulate himself upon the fact that he had not married her. It was only a boy and girl love after all.

It seemed so strange to Gabriel that Edith should have been so disturbed on seeing him. Could it be that she had overheard the unkind words he had said about her the day before her flight? And was it possible that the girl liked him with more than a cousinly affection?

Gabriel dismissed this thought at once, and blamed himself for being so vain.

Edith had put no address, but Gabriel knew that Charley was a friend of Dick Denmead's, and in all probability would know where to find him.

Perhaps, after all, it was a good job that she had made a failure, for now she would see there was no chance of her making a living on the stage.

Gabriel had an old-fashioned prejudice against actors, and he did not like the idea of Edith being one.

Edith's letter was still in his hand when Charley rushed into the room, upsetting a chair in his hurry.

Gabriel looked up reprovingly.

"The war rumours had some foundation after all!" observed Charley; "and we shall have to go to Africa!"

"I'd sooner go anywhere else!" said Gabriel, not quite understanding Charley's delight.

"Anything is better than the monotony of barrack life," observed Charley.

"Now I warn you before we start," observed Gabriel, "that if you expose yourself to unnecessary danger I'll make no attempt to rescue you."

"Oh! I daresay we'll settle the Boer fellows in no time," said Charley, disdainfully.

"Come now, old fellow, don't begin boasting. Wait until the battle is fought and won."

"It is very lucky, our regiment was picked out," cried Charley.

"Yes, we ought to deem ourselves very fortunate," said Gabriel, drily; "but let us speak about another matter. I want to find out the whereabouts of my cousin. Can you put me up to anything?"

"Dick Denmead will tell me anything I wish to know," said Charley, quite cheerfully. "Poor old fellow, he'll be bitterly disappointed at your cousin's failure."

We may mention that Gabriel had taken Charley into his confidence, and told him everything about Edith.

"When shall you see Dick Denmead?"

"This very day," said Charley.

"Until you do see him I shall be all anxiety, for you know my cousin Edith gave me the slip once, and may do so again," said Gabriel.

"She seems to be a regular little spitfire according to the letters you just showed me," replied Charley. "It was most unfortunate, though, that you should have upset her performance."

"Do me the favour to go to Dick Denmead at once?"

"I'll order my dog-cart and we'll go off together," replied Charley. "A drive through the green English country will do us good before we go abroad."

"It is most doubtful if we shall ever return," said Gabriel, quietly.

"Don't talk so despondingly, old chap," replied Charley, and then he went out to order the dog-cart.

The place where Edith lived was some fifteen miles from the barracks, but Charley had a good horse, and they went along at a rapid pace. Gabriel was somewhat surprised when he passed the cottage where Isidore had lived, and was astonished at his own indifference when the church came in view. On the day when he had stood at the church door he had thought that he would never hope to be happy again in this world.

Charley pulled up before the ivy-covered brick wall, over which Edith had looked when Gabriel had hurried by on that memorable day.

They found Mr. Dick Denmead smoking in the garden, and immediately he spoke Gabriel took a fancy to him.

He was a perfect gentleman in thought and feeling, and the heart that beat in his breast was a noble one.

In a few well-chosen words Charley told Dick the object of their visit, and he listened with a serious look on his face.

"I am sure Edith will not see you," he said. "She had an idea that you would find her out, and told me that she would not see you. At the present moment she is locked in her room."

"I had really no intention of injuring Edith in the profession she has adopted," said Gabriel, speaking very frankly. "In fact, I was quite in ignorance that I should see her when I went to the theatre."

"It was all through me that he went," said Charley, speaking as though he had been guilty of a great offence.

"I like Edith very much indeed," said the actor; "but I must own that she has many faults. She is much too proud, and has such a fierce, resentful temper. She was very ungrateful to me last night, although I did all in my power to serve her. She told me that I had no business to persuade her to go on the stage; that I was cruel to encourage her with false hopes."

"Edith has been spoilt by her bringing up," said Gabriel, anxious to speak in favour of his cousin. "You really must not blame her."

"Well," said Dick Denmead, with one of his droll stage smiles, "I must admit that your cousin Edith is gifted with the power of using the strongest and most vigorous language."

"You have been out of pocket through my cousin?" said Gabriel.

"It is being under obligations to me that makes Edith so angry," replied Dick Denmead. "She is grateful to me, and yet she is annoyed at having to be grateful."

"I understand you perfectly," said Gabriel, and then he pulled out his purse. "How much is my cousin peculiarly indebted to you? I do not mean to imply that she can ever pay you for your disinterested kindness," seeing Dick Denmead flush, "for that would be impossible."

"No, no! I will not take one farthing!" protested Dick.

"Why?"

"Because it would seem as though I had some interested motive in bringing her out," said Dick. "Besides, in her present temper, Edith would sooner be under obligations to me than you, although you are her cousin."

"Don't be a fool," whispered Charley, taking him aside. "Gabriel Thorne can afford to pay, and I know the money would be acceptable."

"I am rather hard up," returned Dick Denmead, in a whisper. "But still it does not seem the right thing to take money from a cousin that Edith seems to hate."

Gabriel was hurt at these words, for he had given Edith no cause to hate him. She was unreasonable and unjust.

He almost thought his cousin a little mad. Certainly her conduct was most strange.

"She is the most eccentric girl I have ever seen," Gabriel tells himself, almost longing to bring her into subjection in some way. "What a thing it would be to conquer such a proud, insolent spirit!"

If he was spared from the war, Gabriel determined to make it his business to subdue Edith in some way, for his will was quite as strong as hers.

"If you take the money justly owing to you," said Gabriel, "you will not be putting Edith under an obligation to a cousin whom she hates!"

"Why not?"

Gabriel then told the terms of the will. "So you see," he said, in conclusion, "that Edith is really entitled to half the money, and she should have it if it were in my power to give it to her!"

At length Dick Denmead was persuaded to take the money for Edith's board and lodging. It was rather under the mark than over it, and, in fact, Gabriel was quite surprised.

"You charge very little," said Gabriel, with a smile.

"Edith costs us hardly anything," replied Dick. "You know, she sleeps with my daughter, and her appetite is very small."

He did not exactly tell the truth, for, as we know, Edith was a very luxurious young lady.

Gabriel not only paid what was owing, but paid three months in advance; so he had no anxiety concerning Edith's future.

He took the precaution to warn Denmead not to say a word to Edith concerning the transaction, and the actor was only too willing to agree to this.

"You will do me a very great favour," said Gabriel, in his grave earnest way.

"I shall only be too happy," replied Dick Denmead, eagerly.

"Tell my cousin that if she refuses to see me to-day she may never see me again in this world," said Gabriel. "All I beg of her to do is to give me a five minutes' interview."

The message was given to Edith through Dick Denmead's wife, whose face was absolutely blistered by the paint she had used in her profession. Unlike most actresses, Mrs. Denmead was not an actress off the stage.

Gabriel waited, just a little anxious, for the girl's answer. His heart beat quicker than he would have liked to own when Mrs. Denmead re-entered the room alone.

"Well?" asked Gabriel.

"I hardly like to give you her message," said Mrs. Denmead, hesitatingly.

"But I must hear it," said Gabriel firmly, in such decided tones that Mrs. Denmead was obliged to comply with his request.

"Well, then, she says she never wishes to see you again."

"Tell her," said Gabriel, the colour mounting to his face, "that I hope she may never regret her cruel words."

Gabriel drove away in the dog-cart so very sadly that Charley did not dare to cheer him up. Edith looked after him from the window. She regretted now having given the message, but it was too late.

Weeks passed on, and Edith fondly hoped that Gabriel would return. But he never came, and Edith began to think that she had gone just a little too far, and that he would never forgive her.

She often cried sometimes when she thought how recklessly she had thrown away Gabriel's honest, manly friendship.

Her surprise was very great when she heard that Gabriel's regiment had gone out to the war. It was one in the front, and Edith prayed every night that Gabriel might be spared. His last words would often come into her mind,—

"Tell my cousin that if she refuses to see me to-day she may never see me again!"

CHAPTER VI.

NOTWITHSTANDING her great anxiety concerning Gabriel, Edith studied hard. It was only when at work that Edith ceased to think of Gabriel. Once more Edith appeared on the stage, and acted her part more than creditably, but even Dick Denmead was disappointed and the girl dissatisfied.

After a time, however, Edith began to appreciate applause, and then her acting improved, and her future was assured. From a task her profession became a pleasure, and she acted and spoke with an earnestness that quite surprised herself, and awoke the enthusiasm of those who went to see her.

Edith was one of those actresses who really feel what they say. Some people think it better that an actor should not be carried away by the excitement of his own emotion; that while he holds the audience spell-bound he himself should be cool and unmoved. There is no hard-and-fast line in this matter, however, for there have been good actors on both sides.

Edith was greatly surprised that she should take such a great interest in acting, and as for Dick Denmead he was greatly delighted, and people congratulated him for bringing such a clever woman out.

Edith had been prejudiced against the stage, but she was agreeably surprised to find how many eminent and agreeable persons were engaged in the difficult task of amusing their fellow-creatures.

Miss Thorne had not begun her theatrical career with any great flourish of trumpets, but she soon managed to take almost the leading part, and some of the other actresses were rather sorry she had.

"You see, Edith, that I was not mistaken," observed Dick Denmead. "I knew you were a born actress from the first."

"How can I thank you sufficiently for your kindness," replied Edith, contritely.

"Pray forgive me for all the unkind words I have uttered, and the ungrateful way I behaved to you because I failed in the first attempt."

She was somewhat changed now, and had grown less selfish and exacting, and Dick Denmead was astonished at the change that had come over her. She was just as hot-tempered and still very vain, but she struggled hard against those faults, and partly succeeded in conquering them.

She found it a most difficult thing to do, for there was always some sarcastic remark on the tip of her tongue, when she would check herself by a great effort of will.

So while Gabriel was slowly marching with his regiment under the burning, glaring sun of the African void; while he shared in the hardships and dangers with his fellow countrymen, and fought hand to hand, and saw many a noble soldier fall like the corn under the sickle, and heard the loud discordant yells of the enemy and the cries of the wounded and dying; while he slept in the camp, surrounded by a host of pitiless foes, who crawled into the tent, Edith was playing in a great glittering London theatre, and receiving well-merited applause.

At length Edith read in the papers that Gabriel was wounded in the memorable battle when a famous General perished through his own incautious act, by rushing forward instead of remaining shoulder to shoulder with his comrades in arms. Thus the square had been broken into, and the tide of victory nearly turned.

Luckily for Edith it was Sunday morning when she heard the news, and she could rest. Had it been on any other day she would not have been able to go through her part at the theatre.

On the Monday evening she appeared on the stage just as if nothing had happened, but she was very pale, and had had to use an extra quantity of paint.

Some weeks went by, and one day a tall man with a very brown walnut face was walking with another fellow much shorter than himself.

It was Charley Paget and Gabriel Thorne, who had lived to return home.

Gabriel had been wounded, but the wound had not been a serious one.

Charley Paget was very fond of looking in shop windows, and stopped at stationer's. There were some photographs of actors, and suddenly Charley gave a cry of surprise that made Gabriel stare.

"There is the portrait of your cousin Edith!" said Charley.

"Nonsense," said Gabriel; but he looked nevertheless, and saw at once that his friend was right.

"Wonder where she is playing?" said Charley.

"We can easily find out if she is playing in London by looking over the newspapers," said Gabriel.

"Let us look at the playbills!" suggested Charley. "We can do that easily enough as we stroll down the Strand!"

The third theatre they came to they saw Edith's name on the bill, and in a very prominent position.

Charley was delighted.

"You must find out her address, and go and see her at once," said Charley, impulsively.

Gabriel only shook his head, and a proud look came into his face that made it look almost cruel.

"Why won't you go and see her?" asked Charley.

"She sent me away last time, and I'll never go to see her again," observed Gabriel.

"But she did not know you were going abroad!" said Charley.

Gabriel was silent and not convinced, and they both walked on.

Gabriel said good-bye to Charley after they had lunched together.

Charley went to see Edith that night, and when she was leaving the theatre went to speak to Dick Denmand.

"Hullo, Charley!" said Dick, his eyes sparkling with delight; and he held out both his hands. "So you have come back safe and sound, and don't look a penny the worse for all you have gone through!"

Charley was about to make an answer; but Edith, who had turned very white, asked the young man to give her news of her cousin Gabriel.

"I heard that he was wounded!" she said, in a voice that trembled.

"Yes, he was wounded in that terrible battle when brave Wauchope fell!" said Charles Paget, putting on a very grave face. He was acting cruelly for once in his life. He wished to find out if Edith cared much for Gabriel, and he wished to punish her for her treatment of her cousin.

If anyone offended Gabriel they offended him, but Charley could not understand how anyone could feel angry with such a beautiful creature.

"I have heard no news since!" replied Edith. "Do tell me the worst; let me know if he is living or dead? It is cruel to keep me in suspense!"

"Gabriel is all right now. The wound he received would have been nothing particular but for the heat of the climate!"

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Edith; and then there was a sob, and she burst into tears.

Early next morning Charley hastened to tell Gabriel of his meeting with Edith, and how she had shed tears on hearing of his safety.

"You might forgive and forget?" observed Charley.

"I have nothing to forgive!" said Gabriel; "but a man cannot always forget even if he desires to do so."

"I am sure the girl loves you in her own heart. Come and see her to-day. I have her address!"

Gabriel flatly refused to go and see Edith.

He had resolved never to speak to her again, but he was pleased she had shed tears on his account. Isidore had caused him great grief, and he was glad to be revenged upon another woman—a woman who had sent him an insulting message.

"She told me that she never wished to see me again, and I'll not trouble her," said Gabriel.

"I did not think that you had such a revengeful spirit!" said Charley.

"You forget that I am only obeying my cousin's commands," replied Gabriel, thinking that Charley could make no answer to this.

"I fully believe you are breaking her heart," Charley said.

"Women's hearts are not so easily broken," observed Gabriel with an incredulous smile, and then the subject dropped.

Charley was a most clumsy fellow in some things. In fact, he was as awkward as he was good-hearted.

He had made up his mind to bring Edith and Gabriel together, for he believed that Gabriel loved the girl, although he would not own it. He went to see Edith at Dick Denmand's house many times, and at length suggested that Edith and Dick should pay Gabriel a visit. He had a good excuse, for Gabriel was still lame from his wound. The girl made no objection to this, and one morning they all called upon him.

While they were waiting on the steps Edith caught sight of Gabriel, who was standing at the window. She only had a glimpse of him, for he drew back on seeing her.

"Mr. Thorne is not at home," said the servant who opened the door; and, deeply hurt and mortified, Edith turned away.

Charley was highly indignant at his friend's conduct, and kept away from him for a whole week, greatly to Gabriel's surprise. Then they met at a club, and were on their old terms again.

"You put me in a very false position," observed Charley, in reproachful tones.

"How?"

"By refusing to see your cousin when I brought her to your house. I did not think you would commit such an ungentlemanly action."

"You acted very wrongly in bringing her to me," said Gabriel, quietly. "You know very well my aversion to actresses."

"I am sure I acted for the best," said Charley, as he smoked a cigarette. "How could I help doing all in my power to bring you together when I knew very well how dearly and truly she loves you? She is growing thinner and paler day by day, and Dick Denmand is growing quite alarmed about her. The wear and tear of a theatrical life and the worry will kill her!"

Gabriel listened politely to all Charley had to say, and when he had quite finished, declared him to be the best-hearted fellow in the wide world.

"Edith has had no end of good offers," remarked Charley; "but she will not accept the most eligible man!"

"Have you made a proposal?" asked Gabriel; and then Charley laughed.

Gabriel would have been very sorry to hear of Edith's marriage. It would have inflicted much pain upon him if she had become a wife. How flattering it was to his self-love and vanity that she remained unmarried for love of him!

Gabriel had bought a portrait of Edith, which he very often looked at, and yet he kept from her determinedly. It was his fixed purpose.

He had not dared to go to the theatre in which she played, for fear that if he saw her again he might give way and speak to her.

They were better apart, he told himself, for had he not been deceived by one woman, and were they not all alike? Gabriel was growing very cynical, and was ever ready to make some bitter remark against women.

He talked about them in such a way that Charley grew quite indignant, and took up the cudgels in their defence, like the generous little fellow he was.

"At all events, you can say nothing against your cousin Edith!" he said, triumphantly. "No one has ever dared to breathe a word against her, although she is a public character now!"

"Have you ever heard me say anything against my cousin?" asked Gabriel.

"You only say that she is headstrong and obstinate, and has got the worst temper of any woman in the world!"

"But I never say anything against her moral character."

"Simply because you can't!" said Charley, defiantly.

And then Gabriel shook hands with his friend, and said "good-bye." He was going down to Berner's End to see his father and mother. The place no longer seemed so pleasant to him as it used, although he was made very welcome.

May had been married since he had been in Africa, and he missed her greatly.

The house was not half so cheerful without his sister, and he saw with sorrow that his mother was in a bad state of health. A friend had been killed during Gabriel's accident.

Gabriel had believed himself to be the one going to death when he had said good-bye; and now this friend, living in this quiet country town, had been killed by a fall from his horse. Everything seemed so different to Gabriel that he was glad to get back to London. He reproached himself for this unnatural feeling when he was in the train.

Charley soon called upon him and told him all the fashionable gossip, and Gabriel listened to him listlessly enough. Then he contrived to speak of Edith, and Gabriel was glad, for he liked to hear news of her, although he would not have liked anyone to know this.

"I think you ought to interfere in some way!" said Charley, very abruptly.

"Interfere in what?" asked Gabriel.

"In this matter, in regard to your cousin Edith," replied Charley.

"My dear boy, for Heaven's sake be more explicit!" observed Gabriel, who was reclining on a couch, for the wound in the leg was not yet cured, and he liked to take matters easy when he could, like most of us.

"Well, I hope you will not get in a very great temper when I tell you what has happened," observed Charley, bringing his

chair nearer to the couch; "but you will be greatly provoked, I know, old fellow."

"I don't think my cousin Edith can annoy in any way," said Gabriel, disdainfully.

"But I am sure you are too much of a gentleman not to be annoyed when you hear of the annoyance Edith has been subjected to," said Charley. "A wealthy secondrel has been following her about on every occasion, and sometimes when he has had opportunity has actually spoken to her. At last she has been compelled to go to the police, and her annoyance has ceased."

"If the annoyance has ceased it is all right," said Gabriel. "My cousin did a sensible thing to complain to the police!"

"But the cur has taken a most mean and cowardly revenge," said Charley. "He is now spreading injurious reports against one of the purest girls I have ever known. He says things about Edith that would bring the blood to your face. She is your cousin, you remember, and it is your duty to protect her, although you have quarrelled."

Gabriel was often obliged to listen to reproaches like this from Charley's lips. Gabriel was rather astonished at his friend's audacity, for he had never lectured him until lately.

"Tell me the name of the man who has dared to insult Edith?" said Gabriel, showing his fine white teeth, a habit he had when annoyed. He spoke so quietly that Charley knew that he was beginning to lose his temper.

"Valentine North."

"Yes, I know him well by sight," said Gabriel, rising from the couch. "I must settle accounts with him at once."

"Don't do anything very desperate," said Charley.

"Edith's honour is as dear to me as though she were my sister," declared Gabriel. "No one shall dare to breathe a word against her fair fame."

"What do you intend to do?"

"If I were a Frenchman I should have a duel!" said Gabriel; "but I shall settle the matter my own way."

Gabriel said no more on the subject, but Charley saw that he was greatly roused. "If he meets that little beast I pity him," Charley thought. On that evening Gabriel seemed in the best and highest of spirits. He and his friend dined together, and then looked in at the Promenade Concerts for an hour or two, just to pass the time, and after this turned into their club.

Charley and Gabriel were passing the time very pleasantly at the club, when suddenly a loud voice fell upon both their ears, and Edith Thorne's name was mentioned. Gabriel recognised the voice. Charley wanted to go and warn Valentine North of his danger, but his friend seized him by the arm, and bade him sit still.

"I want to hear what he has to say," said Gabriel.

He had a frown on his face that Charley did not like.

What Valentine North had to say was something that made Gabriel's broad chest heave with rage, and the steady grey eyes turn as black as night. He was almost terrible in his anger, and Charley really felt frightened as to how the matter would end.

Valentine North uttered the foulest lies that were ever uttered against a young woman.

There was a peculiar twitch on Gabriel's lips when he rose to his feet. Very slowly he walked across to the little group that had gathered round Valentine North.

"Be good enough to repeat the calumnies you have just added against a lady," said Gabriel Thorne, in tones of repressed passion.

Everyone looked at Gabriel, and there

was an ominous silence—the calm before the storm.

There was going to be a scene.

Valentine turned very red, and at that moment wished almost that he could sink into the earth.

"I am only saying what I know to be true," replied Valentine North. "She is no worse and no better than any other actress. They are a free-and-easy lot."

"You'll have to own that you told a cruel and unnecessary lie," said Gabriel, panting for breath.

"Are you interested in the lady?" asked Valentine North.

"Just a little," said Gabriel Thorne, speaking very slowly and distinctly, so that every one in the room could hear what he said; "for the young lady in question is my cousin, for whom I have every reason to respect."

The answer was a most unexpected one, and Valentine North grew more and more confused as he found himself in a hornet's nest.

"Indeed!" he said. "I was not aware of that fact."

"If you had been aware that the lady had someone to protect her," said Gabriel Thorne, with a look of noble, manly indignation on his face, "you would never have profaned her name with your coward lips. No, you took advantage of her helplessness, her apparent isolation, to revile one who rejected your unwelcome advances with scorn."

"Come now," said North, trying to talk big and looking little. "Come now, I say, you are using strong language."

"I cannot use an epithet less strong when I speak to a cur like you," said Gabriel Thorne.

"I had better go," said North, trembling from head to foot, and turning a palish colour—the colour a youth turns after smoking his first cigar.

"Before you quit this room," said Gabriel Thorne, planting his stalwart back against the door, "before you pass into the passage you must write an acknowledgment that you have fabricated wicked slanders against my cousin. You shall write this, and sign the document with your name."

"I can't do that. I know more about Edith than you do," said Valentine.

His insolent use of his cousin's Christian name, his wicked innuendos, maddened Gabriel. Scarcely had the words left his lips when Gabriel struck out, hitting Valentine right between the eyes. He fell down, stunned and bleeding.

For a moment everyone thought that Valentine was dead, but Gabriel cared not if he had killed him. Gabriel was a man of herculean build, and had never undermined his glorious strength by reckless dissipation. Valentine had no more chance against him than a mouse with a cat.

Valentine was lifted to his feet and placed on a chair, and slowly came to his senses. He said not a word, but when he had sufficiently recovered staggered out of the room.

The men in the club gathered round Gabriel and shook hands with him, and all declared that he was perfectly right in what he had done. Valentine never showed himself in the club again, for he knew he would have the cold shoulder.

Charley was very proud of Gabriel, and told him so.

"You really do love that girl!" he said.

"I do not love her; but I would protect her honour with my life!"

You may be sure that Charley was not long in telling Edith of Gabriel's defence of her, and, of course, she was extremely grateful.

She had loved Gabriel before, but she fairly idolised him now, as well she might.

"Thank him for me," she said, simply, and Charley did what she asked.

Gabriel seemed annoyed that she had been told anything about the matter.

"I don't wish her to know that I take any interest in her," said Gabriel, quickly; but he hardly knew whether to be angry or pleased. Gabriel had been afraid that Valentine would summon him for assault, but he made no attempt to do so.

Charley was never tired of warning Gabriel against Valentine North. He was certain that the man would do Gabriel some harm. His very silence made Charley all the more suspicious. He knew Valentine's character better than his friend did.

A new play came out, in which Edith had a prominent part. On the first night there was a most disgraceful scene. Men hissed and stamped, and two or three more unruly than the others had to be expelled from the theatre. All the papers praised the piece, and the critics spoke favourably of Edith, and consequently at a loss to account for the uproarious men that had filled the theatre. It was observed that the men only hissed when Edith was on the stage, so it was evident that their spite was directed against her.

In a few days the matter was quite cleared up, much to Gabriel's gratification. The mean and contemptible Valentine North had paid some twenty fellows to hiss Edith. Then all the story came out. How Valentine had made love to Edith, and had been scornfully rejected; how then he had resorted to slander, and, finally, how Gabriel had given him well-merited chastisement. He was held up to the derision of every one, and was glad to leave London, for the time at least.

Of course all this talk about Edith was to the young actress's advantage, for thousands of people were anxious to see her, and crowds were turned from the door. There was no standing room even, and the manager was delighted. Woe to the unlucky person who dared to hiss now! Her appearance on the stage was always accompanied by the clapping of hands.

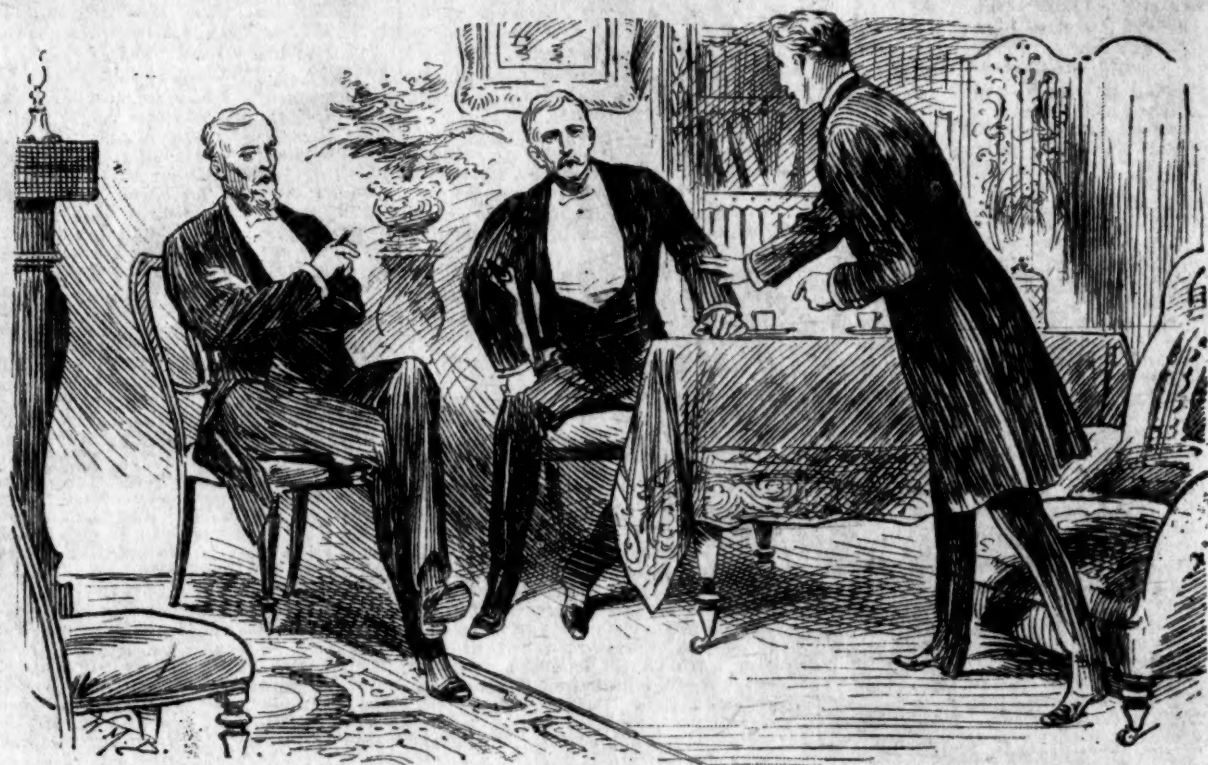
Edith lived very modestly, although she had a fair income, but she was not a woman to care for display. Her behaviour was so very decorous that Gabriel respected her more and more.

Gabriel had left the army, and seeing that Edith was in a good position, began to spend his Uncle Richard's money. He gave his father enough money to retire from business, but the old lawyer would not think of such a thing. He accepted the money, and went on working very hard. He was engaged in a law case which he expected would make his fortune. A marriage certificate had just been found, and there no longer seemed the slightest doubt as to the ultimate result.

Charley invited Gabriel down to his place in Devonshire, and introduced him to his sister. Her name was Minnie, but in Gabriel's eyes she was a regular female Charley. She had the same laughing eyes, the same pleasing smile, and the same merry laugh. Charley had warned Minnie not to fall in love with Gabriel, and had declared him to be engaged.

Perhaps, if she had not been told this she might have fallen in love with Gabriel. As it was they were very good friends. Gabriel spent quite a delightful time down in Devonshire. Very often they would have a sail on the sea, and then it was that Minnie showed them that she understood a sailing boat better than the two men.

Gabriel Thorne had been staying two months with Charley, when he received a long letter from his sister May.



"DR. WARD, SHOULD YOU RECOGNISE MR. GRESHAM?" SAID PAUL BERESEFORD WITH SUPPRESSED EMOTION.

(Illustrating the brilliant story IVY'S PERIL.)

"I have been desperately ill, but I am better now," she wrote. "It has been such a long, weary illness, and I am still very feeble. You will be so surprised when I tell you who nursed me through; I am sure you will."

"The person who was by my side is the kindest, most self-sacrificing, delicious little angel I have ever met; and had it not been for her unceasing vigilance and care I should never have pulled round. That is what the doctor says, and he ought to know a little about the matter."

"My husband is very grateful to this little nurse—so grateful, that I tell him I shall grow jealous. She is as good as she is pretty, and I love her very much."

"The best of it all is, she does not think she has done anything wonderful in risking her life when I had that malignant fever. She was no hired nurse. Such love, such tenderness, such devotion, such supreme self-denial cannot be purchased with money any more than money can open the gates of Heaven. She is a relation of ours, Gabriel, a dark-faced girl, with the most magnificent eyes I have ever seen."

"She gave up a good engagement in order to render me assistance. I have only to tell you that she is an actress by profession for you to know her name."

"Edith!" cried Gabriel Thorne, before turning over the sheets. "On the other side the name was written."

"Who is Edith?" asked Minnie, laughingly; "a sweetheart of yours, I suppose? The young lady you are engaged to?"

"Edith is my cousin, and I am engaged to no one!" replied Gabriel. "What put such an idea in your little head, Minnie?"

Minnie glanced towards Charley, who

gave her an imploring look in return, which plainly meant "do not betray me?"

"I thought that a handsome fellow like you would be sure to be engaged?" said Minnie, with one of her merriest laughs. "Girls always like great strong men over six feet high, with sinews that a prizefighter would envy."

"Thank you," said Gabriel, giving the girl a smile. Then he turned to Charley, and asked him when the next train started to London.

"Going away?" cried Charley, in dismay.

"Going away?" repeated Minnie. "Your determination is a very sudden one, since you arranged to go to the cricket match. I thought you took such a great interest in the noble English sport, and wished to see the County match!"

"Unfortunately I have received a letter acquainting me that my sister is very ill," said Gabriel.

"I am sorry to hear you have such bad news?" said Minnie.

"You'll have to hurry if you wish to catch the next train for London!" said Charley. "You had better start at once, and I can send your luggage after you."

Gabriel shook hands with the brother and sister, and hurried away.

They were sorry to lose Gabriel. Minnie liked him very much, and thought him the best friend Charley had.

She remembered, too, that he had saved her brother's life. Indeed, it was impossible for her to forget seeing how often Charley mentioned it.

On his arrival in London he went at once to his sister May's house. He was quite startled when he saw her, and could not conceal his sorrow.

Her beautiful hair had been cut off and her face was deathly white, and her hands so very, very thin.

"You are surprised to find me so changed?" said the invalid.

The young man's eyes were filled with tears, and he felt a lump rising in his throat. He really could not speak at that moment, and turned his face away from the light.

"If you had seen me a few weeks ago you would think nothing of my appearance now!" observed May.

He remained a long time with his sister, but saw nothing of Edith. Could it be that she was keeping out of the way?

A Warning to . Cousins

An extremely affecting Novelette, with an impressive moral, will be placed before our readers next week, under the title of

Cousin Jack

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Lord Elstrid's Fate, &c., &c."

It conveys a lesson which shows the dangers cousins sometimes run into quite unawares.

A Serial Story by a Popular



"I WAS MARRIED BEFORE EVER I KNEW YOUR MOTHER, AND WHEN I WEDDED HER MY FIRST WIFE WAS STILL ALIVE!" SAID VYVIAN EYRE.
(Illustrating the splendid romance UNSEEN FIRES.)

May, looking at his handsome face, seemed to read his thoughts.

"You are wondering where Edith is?" said May.

"I had really no idea that you were a thought-reader!" observed Gabriel. "I was thinking of Edith, and had the idea that she was keeping out of the way because she had no desire to see me."

"It is nothing of the kind!" replied May, as she gave one of her bright smiles that lighted up her face.

She looked quite like her old self again, and Gabriel was glad to see this.

"Then why don't she show herself?" asked Gabriel, feeling that he would give anything to see Edith. He wished to express his gratitude for her great kindness to his sister.

"Because she is not here?"

"Not here?" said Gabriel.

"No. She went to Dick Denmead's yesterday. She has a new engagement, and could remain here no longer. She wished to do so, but there was a written agreement that she could not break."

Gabriel, it may readily be imagined, took the first opportunity of visiting Dick Denmead's house. To his amazement he only found an old caretaker there. The place was to let furnished for six months.

He was informed that Dick, his wife, and Edith was going round the provinces; but she could not mention any one town they were going to; so Gabriel went away rather disheartened.

Of course, it would not be very long before he could find Edith, but being of an impulsive nature, delay was torture to him.

CHAPTER VII.

Edith's health had suffered terribly through nursing her cousin May, and she often felt that the hard work was killing her. The character she was now playing was one that taxed her strength to the utmost, and she was on the stage nearly all the time the performance lasted. She had been to a doctor, and he had advised rest and quiet. If she desired to live she must give up the stage. This she flatly refused to do, for it was the only way she had of obtaining her living.

"I suppose you must go on until you are compelled to give up," said the doctor pityingly. "A delicate girl like you ought never to have gone on the stage. It will ultimately end by killing you."

Perhaps it was all the better to die young, Edith thought, since there was no one to care for her. It was preferable to living to a friendless old age.

She wrote to May, after she had been away a fortnight, a bright, cheerful, clever letter, in which she took care not to mention her ill-health. She did not wish to give her cousin any anxiety. The next place she was going to was E—

Of course, May showed the letter to Gabriel, and he naturally started for E— at once.

It was night time when he reached the town, and Gabriel noticed a peculiar lurid light hanging over it. A fire somewhere, observed some passenger in the carriage.

Once in the street, Gabriel inquired the way to the theatre of the first policeman he met.

"The theatre, sir; it's on fire!" said the police, and as he spoke an engine rattled by.

"Great heavens! Has the performance commenced?" asked Gabriel.

"They were right in the middle of it," responded the policeman, "when the building caught light. I need not tell you the way; you can follow the crowd."

Gabriel did as advised, and soon found himself opposite the burning building.

It was not only a curious crowd, but a desperate crowd, for amongst the lookers-on were those who had relations and friends in the theatre. A line of sturdy policemen were drawn across the street.

"Are they all out of the theatre?" asked Gabriel of one of the policemen.

"They are doing their best to rescue them," answered the policeman.

"How about the actors?"

"They are in a dangerous position."

"You don't think they have a chance?"

"I would not give a farthing for their lives," said Policeman X. "You are looking bad, sir. Have you any friend inside?" and the policeman looked at him pityingly.

Many in the crowd asked to be allowed to pass, but the policemen kept in a line, and sturdily commanded the people to keep back.

"I must save my cousin Edith!" said Gabriel, who towered over everyone else.

"But you can't pass, sir!" replied the policeman, speaking very politely, for he knew instinctively that Gabriel was a gentleman.

"I must, man!" said Gabriel, determinedly.

The policeman shrugged his shoulders like a man who thought Gabriel was not worth answering; but he little knew his strength and courage, and his awful despair.

Without a moment's hesitation he hurled

Author will shortly be commenced.

the policeman aside with a strength that astonished him, even in his wild excitement. He passed through the opening he had made, pushed on by the excited crowd behind him, who widen at the breach like a fierce rush of water through some weak embankment.

Gabriel stood where the noisy fire engines were at work. The liquid that poured upon the doomed building looked like glistening running gold as it played upon the windows, through which the flames quivered and writhed like spiteful serpents' tongues, and through the heavy columns of lurid smoke could be seen the faces of those who had reached the roof of the piazza.

People were dropping down from the stone projection, and were quickly taken to the hospital by willing hands.

Without a thought of his own danger Gabriel climbed up one of the ladders, going, as people told him, to certain death. From a window through which the smoke rushed Gabriel saw a face—the face of Edith, the woman he loved. The ladder was too short, he could not reach her, and then came a cry of horror from the crowd. Edith disappeared from the window, and our hero looked upward in despair. Then a man appeared holding the girl in his arms. Even at that supreme moment, Gabriel felt jealous to see her in another man's arms—brave and true as his face was.

"Take her, mate!" said the man, and he handed her down to Gabriel.

"How about yourself?" said Gabriel. The only answer was a confident laugh, and then Gabriel descended.

No sooner did Gabriel reach the ground than he looked up to see what had become of Edith's brave rescuer. Already the flames had appeared at the window where Edith had stood only a moment ago. But the man had escaped.

He was a sailor in the Royal Navy, and managed to reach the ladder in some extraordinary way. The crowd closed in upon the sailor, and Gabriel never saw him again, for after doing all the good he could the man slunk away, as if ashamed of his own brave deeds.

Edith was more frightened than hurt, and it was with a cheerful heart that Gabriel took her to her lodgings. Dick Denmead and his wife were safe, having left the theatre for refreshment; and their joy in seeing Edith was indescribable, for they had quite given her up for lost.

The next morning's papers, of course, had a long account of the fire, and there were many articles about the insecurity of theatres, and many people wrote up after this to suggest plans which they believed would prevent a repetition of such a sad event. People read these letters, but the excitement soon died away, but, of course, Gabriel and Edith never forgot that moment of supreme peril.

It was not such a long time before Edith and Gabriel became man and wife; and her sister-in-law, May, would tell you, if you asked her, that Edith is the best of wives, the dearest of mothers, and the truest of friends.

[THE END.]

TO-DAY.

"To-day" unsullied comes to thee—new-born,

To-morrow is not thine;

The sun may cease to shine

For thee, ere earth shall greet its morn.

Be earnest, then, in thought and deed,

Nor fear approaching night;

Calm comes with evening light,

And hope, and peace. Thy duty heed "to-day."

IVY'S PERIL.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The mother of Ivy Carew has met her death under very suspicious circumstances many years before the story begins, and Ivy, who is living with her guardian, Sir John Fortescue, at Starham, is dimly conscious that a mystery surrounds her life. Meadow View, in which Ivy was born, has recently been let to George White, and his sister, who take more than ordinary interest in their neighbour. The Rev. Mr. Ainslie recognises in the sister of Mr. White the woman who visited him, under peculiar conditions, many years before, just prior to Ivy's mother's death. Sir John Fortescue and the millionaire are fast friends, and it is evident that the Baroness does not see to what a pass matters are drifting. Meanwhile Paul Beresford has declared his love for Ivy and Lady Fortescue is anxious to see them married. The news of their engagement comes as a surprise to Mr. White and his sister, but they do not openly show their uneasiness. Sir John is prevailed upon to delay the marriage for six months and to undertake a trip to Australia, and his wife accompanies him, and during the voyage they become very friendly with a passenger who eventually proves of great service to them—Ivy is left in charge of Mrs. Austin, while Paul Beresford is sent by the "Security" Co. to take the place of a sick colleague in Edinburgh. Ivy's letters, at first warm and loving, after a time grow quite few and formal. On returning to London he finds the Whites have departed with Ivy and left no trace behind.

CHAPTER VIII.

When left Paul Beresford turned from the door of the millionaire's residence in Coningsby-street, with the curt information that the family had gone to the seaside—somewhere south.

Paul felt as though his brains were on fire; he could hardly take in the whole case calmly enough to form a collected judgment. This sudden departure, coming as it did on the top of his grievous fears for Ivy's health, and honest William Campbell's outspoken opinion of her temporary guardian, utterly unmanned him. He walked down Coningsby-street with the faltering, irregular gait of one who has taken too much drink; he never thought of going near the "Security." His mind had room but for one thought—Ivy.

He went straight back to his chambers in Cecil-street, Strand, and sat down to try and form some theory of George White's motives. He grew calmer now; he had thrown the window wide open, and the chill cold air of the February morning came in and fanned his temples pleasantly. Moreover as he watched the crowded waters of gallant Father Thames, a thought of comfort came to him; he remembered words of Ivy's as they two walked together along the Embankment, and watched the ever varying scene before them.

"I think true love is like the river," the girl had said, half shyly, half proudly, as she walked at her lover's side and listened to his glad pictures of the life they would lead together.

"That is a strange simile," said Paul gently. "Why do you think so, sweetheart?"

"Because nothing can change its course," returned Ivy. "Its current may be slow or rapid, its waters turbid or clear and bright, but nothing can stop their passage on and on until they reach the ocean. And true love, Paul, goes on and on till death."

With the memories of these words Paul grew less wretched; the girl, who had told him death alone could check true love, would not forsake him, whatever calumnies were spoken of in her hearing. Ivy might be anxious, nay, she might even doubt, but she would never cast him off until they had stood face to face, and she had heard his own defence.

Under this reassuring certainty, Paul could look more quietly into the mystery which seemed to baffle him. It was, of course, possible that Mr. White and his sister had no evil designs against Ivy's

love affairs; it was possible they decided quite suddenly to go south, and that a letter containing the news and giving their full address, was even now awaiting him at Edinburgh. Luckily Mrs. Campbell had promised to send on his letters promptly, so to-morrow morning's post would decide this question.

Had he never distrusted George White, had Mr. Campbell not told him frankly there was an ugly secret in the man's life, Paul would have accepted this favourable view of the millionaire's conduct, and waited at least till the morrow with tolerable patience, though in much disappointment. But as things were, his mind dwelt more on the possibilities of foul play. Would anyone, his suspicions demanded, as well known and opulent as George White have shut up his house and dismissed his establishment at a minute's notice without some startling cause. Would any wealthy family decamp, as it were, and leave no address behind them unless they had some urgent motive for secrecy?

Paul had only got so far in his musings when a bright idea flashed on him; besides the house in Coningsby-street Mr. White occupied offices in the City.

It is hardly likely he had deserted these without leaving some address, as Paul remembered the packs of letters it had been his duty to answer every morning. He felt that George White could not have risked losing his vast correspondence.

Paul's misery lessened with this thought; here at least was something to be done, or at least attempted; and in his present mood anything in the world was preferable to sitting down to inaction.

He did not take a cab this time. He could not have given the wings of his own impatience to the horse, and it was a relief to him to stride along at a furious pace, and feel that every step brought him nearer to tidings of his darling.

The offices were not deserted. Paul drew a breath of satisfaction as he noticed the familiar name still on the door, and he knocked eagerly for admittance.

Mr. White had not engaged a second secretary, but contented himself with a young man whom he termed his clerk, and whose duties consisted in occupying a high stool in the outer office from ten till four, delivering messages in Mr. White's absence, and ushering in callers to his private sanctum when he was to be seen.

Paul had marvelled not a little at the arrangement, and had been much surprised at the clerk finally selected from about two hundred applicants.

John Dudley (he never aspired to "Mr." until he obtained his post at the millionaire's) was about twenty. He wrote a very good hand, was remarkably punctual and orderly, but beyond these qualities he had nothing to recommend him.

He was most incorrigibly dull—a writing-machine would have fulfilled his duties equally as well. John obeyed his employer to the minutest detail; in fact, his obedience was so liberal that there had been more than one laugh in Coningsby-street at his expense.

It was alleged by Mr. White—but this may have been exaggeration—he once despatched Dudley with a letter to a friend staying at the Charing-Cross Hotel, with instructions to wait for an answer.

The friend had left London for the day, and was not expected until eleven. It was then just noon, but John Dudley planted his back patiently against the door of the absentee, and prepared to undergo his eleven hours of waiting as contentedly as possible.

The story went that at five o'clock, amazed at his delay, Mr. White sent after

him, and scolded him, roundly for being such a simpleton.

This was always remembered against John as an instance of his profound denseness, and Paul recalled it with great relief as soon as he saw the clerk's shock head.

John Dudley might be stupid, and wearisome, but he was incapable of fraud. Whatever he said might be implicitly relied upon, for ever had he received instructions to act a part his nature was unable to sustain it. If obedience to his superior made him attempt it he would bungle the affair so terribly as to make the truth transparent.

This young man stared at Paul Beresford much as though he had been a runaway hyena or any other pett captive escaped from the Zoological Gardens.

Paul felt provoked at his distended eyes. What did the fellow mean by expressing so much surprise at his appearance? Wasn't it the most natural thing in the world that Ivy Carew's lover should visit her temporary guardian?

"Is Mr. White in?"

"He is not!" replied Dudley, shortly.

"When will he be?"

"I don't know!"

The young man possibly imagined his questioner would depart, but Paul had no such intentions. He coolly seated himself on the only chair Mr. Dudley's little room possessed, and looked as though he meant to stay some time.

"When was he here last?" was the next demand.

"He's been gone about an hour; went to catch the one o'clock train."

"Where was he going to?"

John Dudley stared hard at the very small fire, and finally got off his stool and poked it violently with a very large poker. Not in the least perturbed at this transparent device, Paul repeated his question.

"Mr. White lives in Coningsby-street," returned the young clerk. "Hadden't you better go and make inquiries there?"

Mr. Beresford turned round and looked at John with smothered contempt.

"I know you had not many brains," he said scornfully; "but I thought you were honest. Don't try fencing with me, but answer a plain question truthfully. Where are your employer and his family?"

"He said I was not to tell you."

"That's right," said Paul, in quite another tone; "he's your master, and I suppose you've a right to obey him if you like, only don't try and bamboozle me. I expect you know perfectly well Mr. White has left London almost at a moment's notice, and taken Miss Carew away, so that I should not be able to discover her whereabouts?"

"It's not his fault," observed the clerk slowly, and looking Paul Beresford in the face. "If I had been in his place I should have done just the same."

The idea of the billious-looking, round-faced youth in the place of the millionaire was almost too much for Paul. Troubled as he was, a smile passed over his face.

"Perhaps, as you defend Mr. White so warmly, you are aware of his motive in hiding Miss Carew from her future husband?"

"I know why he is hiding her from you," returned the youth frankly. "He told me all about it; he said it might be a warning to me."

"Perhaps, in your turn, you will tell me. Although it is about myself, I believe it will be complete news."

"Mr. White didn't say I was to tell you."

"Did he order you not to?"

"No."

"Then you'd better gratify my curiosity," returned Paul, gravely.

The youthful clerk looked a little taken aback. He gazed at Mr. Beresford with profound admiration.

"My!" he said at last, "you do take it cool. Why, if I'd done a barefaced thing like that I'd be ashamed to look at anyone who knew it."

"Once more, will you tell me what you mean? Speak plainly, please, I warn you. My patience is nearly exhausted."

"Why, you went and proposed to Miss Carew, the greatest heiress in England!"

"And was accepted; our engagement receiving her uncle's full approval."

"But he didn't know then. Bless you, Mr. Beresford, he found out the moment he got to Australia! The lady went up to his hotel, and told him you were her lawful wedded husband, and begged and prayed of him to send you back to her!"

"What?" almost gasped Paul; "boy, are you beside yourself?"

"You don't take it so cool as you did!" said Mr. Dudley; "it's just as I say, the game's up! You very nearly committed bigamy, but you're stopped in time. Your wife she told the whole story to Sir John Fortescue, and he cabled to Mr. White to take Miss Carew away from London, and protect her from you at any cost."

Dead silence. Paul was too amazed to speak. In his wildest dreams of George White's malice he had never imagined such a thing as this. He was certain in his own mind the story told to John Dudley was a hoax. It was utterly impossible such a story could have been told to Sir John, and, even more so, that he would believe it.

The cablegram and its contents were an invention pure and simple, but they had effectually done their work in giving the millionaire a pretext to hide Ivy from her lover. She was too pure and true to credit the slander, but if she believed the cablegram was from her uncle, however deceived she thought Sir John, she might consent to refrain from seeing her lover until the next Australian mail was in.

Paul felt terribly downcast as he thought over matters. He knew so few people in England. None except Mr. Griffiths, whose acquaintance with him dated many years back. He was conscious of his own innocence of this bogus charge; but he was far from certain how to prove its falseness. And was not the attack a crafty one—almost as though Mr. White had foreseen the young man's intention to persuade Ivy into a secret marriage; and, foreseeing it brought forward an accusation which would make any girl in the world, however trustful in her lover, yet feel uneasy if he proposed to her a runaway wedding.

John Dudley was very dull, but he was honest, and so perhaps he recognised honesty in others.

Paul was still lost in thought when the youth stepped off his high stool, and coming forward put out a very ink-stained hand.

"I'm sure there's a mistake somewhere. Mr. Beresford," he said, awkwardly. "I'd been thinking uncommonly hard things of you, but I seem to know now you never did it!"

"As Heaven is my witness, Dudley, I never did! I never spoke a word of love. I never plighted my troth, to any woman until I gave both love and troth to Ivy Carew; and were she a penniless waif, instead of a counted heiress, it would still be the dearest wish of my heart to call her wife."

"Bravo," said John, applaudingly. "Mr. Beresford, I can't give you the address because I've promised not to, but the governor will be here at ten o'clock on Monday, and if you come then I'll manage that you see him."

It was kindly meant, but that was Friday

afternoon. Paul groaned as he thought of the delay.

"I'll not ask you to betray your master's secrets, my boy; but you'll just answer me a question or two that can't hurt him. Have you seen Miss Carew lately?"

"I saw her on Monday, I had to go up to Coningsby-street with some letters."

"And do you think she knows? I mean, have they told her this vile slander about me?"

John Dudley considered a moment.

"I should say not," he replied cautiously. "She was writing a letter to Australia, and she didn't seem to know what to say; I had to wait an hour, and I don't think she wrote six lines. Now if she'd heard of the cablegram she'd have had only too much to write about. Besides—"

It dawned on Paul that John Dudley was not quite such a fool as he looked; then he caught at the last word.

"Besides what? Speak out, my boy, if you've any pity."

"You won't like to hear it, that's why I stopped," said John; "but the fact is, Miss Carew's ill, and as the doctor's orders were she was to be kept cheerful and quite free from worry. It stands to reason they'll never tell her."

Paul Beresford's face had grown white as death; he grasped at the office-table for support.

"Ill!"

"She's been ailing this long time," admitted the clerk, "she caught a cold at Christmas, and she never seemed right since. Mr. White makes an awful fuss about her, and Mrs. Austin seems as if she can't do enough for her, but yet she doesn't get better."

"Why was I not written to?" demanded Paul, almost as if the poor lad before him could have had anything to do with the omission.

"You were written to," said Mr. Dudley; "at least, Miss Carew told me so. She was a very pleasant-spoken young lady, and often, when I've been to Coningsby-street, she'd give me a word or two. I asked her once if you had come back from Edinburgh, and she said Mrs. Austin had tried to persuade you to run up just for three days, but you wrote back you were too busy."

The shortness of Ivy's letters, their sad tone, their utter absence of any allusions to his return were all explained now; she had been told that he, knowing she was ill, had made answer he was too busy to come and see her. Oh! the cruelty of it all! What she must have suffered, poor gentle girl! How her loving heart must have ached at his coldness and neglect!

John Dudley watched him, and felt troubled. It was one thing to be told the young man was a perfidious monster and an intending bigamist; it was quite another to see a brave-hearted lover half beside himself with anxiety.

"Did they have a doctor?" asked Paul, slowly.

"Oh, yes; Doctor Lullington. A very great man indeed; charges three guineas a visit. He thought very favourably of the case—called it want of tone, and prescribed change of air."

"Where does he live?"

"In Harley-street."

"He might have the address!"

"I doubt it. You see, Mr. White did not make up his mind until they were actually at the station."

Beresford rose.

"It's no use my staying here. Dudley, I shall call at ten o'clock on Monday, and you must let me see White. Remember, boy, it's life or death to me."

"You shall see him," returned the clerk,

whose brains seemed wonderfully sharpened by his sympathy. "Be here at half-past nine, and insist on waiting. You're so much bigger than I am that he couldn't expect me to turn you out. There's no train to bring him before ten, so if you're here first see him you must."

Paul felt a thrill of admiration for the shabby clerk, and wondered how he could ever have thought him dull. Then he left the office and drove direct to the "Security."

The manager was in—not the personage who usually acted as such, but the real head of the affair, who contented himself by spending the handsome fortune which came in, and thinking it sufficiently earned if he put in an appearance at the office once in six months.

Paul Beresford had never seen Mr. Milton; in fact, he was beginning to look on him as almost as mythical a person as "Mrs. Harris" of Dickens celebrity.

Over and over again he had heard the name of Mr. Milton; over and over again he had believed he was expected only to be disappointed, so that he had well-nigh ceased to credit his existence.

But it was a great relief to him to find the "chief" there, for he could not forget that the two people next in authority at the "Security" were personal friends of George White, and had accepted his services at the millionaire's recommendation.

In his present mood it was far pleasanter to see someone who had no connection with his foe.

Mr. Milton proved to be a tall handsome man, not far from sixty. He had only filled his present position a few years, and though he reaped a rich harvest from the peculiar rules with which the "Security" had started its career, he was not responsible for them.

He was an honest-looking, frank-hearted man, and Paul felt a sense of confidence as he shook hands with him.

"Ah, Mr. Beresford, I have heard a good deal of you. Quite an acquisition to us, they tell me. How did you like Edinburgh?"

Paul hardly knew how to begin his story. He had touched nothing since a hurried breakfast. It was now three. He was faint from excitement and exhaustion. One time he tried to speak, then he sank back in his chair, and but for Mr. Milton's kindly assistance would have fainted. The chief administered a little water, and then poured out a glass of wine and insisted on its being drunk.

"I should say you had received a sudden shock, Mr. Beresford; you look like it. Now, you have served us very well in Scotland, and if there's anything I can do for you let me hear it."

Thus encouraged, Paul felt another creature.

"May I ask you one question, sir. Are you acquainted with Mr. White?"

"I am not. He is hand and glove with Cleghorn and Harris. I have met him once or twice myself, but I never took to him. We pass the time of day in the street, that's all."

Paul unfolded his story—he made it as brief as possible. He was engaged with her uncle's full consent to Miss Carew, who had been left for a short time under Mr. White's guardianship. The millionaire had taken the young lady away, and was keeping her hidden away from her lover.

Mr. Milton smiled.

"I will help you if I can, young man. I am getting old, but I haven't lost all interest in love affairs. Still, as I hardly know White, I don't quite see how I am to influence him."

"It is not that, sir. I want leave of absence from the office to prosecute my inquiries. I have reasons to believe that Mr. Cleghorn and Mr. Harris, being personal friends of George White, would object to anything that left me free to grapple with him."

"I am master here," said Mr. Milton, a little pompously, "and I will take care people understand that I mean to be. You have my authority to remain away as long as you think necessary; a month if you like."

"Thank you, sir."

"But you have interested me very much in your story; it reads like a novel with the third volume missing. What earthly motive do you suppose George White could have in attempting to separate you and your fiancée?"

"Miss Carew is a great heiress, sir; but as none of her property could come to White unless she married him, I don't see what interest he has in her future."

"Nor I."

"But he has a motive, sir, though I cannot fathom it. Why, before either of us had ever seen her Mr. White gave me instructions to find out whether Miss Carew was engaged, and whether she had good health."

Mr. Milton looked as if a ray of light had fallen suddenly on him; and yet, though his puzzled expression vanished, it gave way to one so anxious that Paul was at a loss to understand how his last speech could have occasioned it.

The chief rang the bell, and gave an order in a low tone to the clerk, who then vanished to return presently with a large official-looking book, which he placed before Mr. Milton. The latter turned over the pages rapidly until he came to what he wanted; then he looked very keenly at Paul.

"Are you a brave man, Mr. Beresford?"

"I hope so, sir."

"I mean if a sudden fear were suggested to you—a fear so absurd that it is probably a mere freak of fancy—should you feel bound to believe it, and make yourself wretched? Or could you go to work calmly to make the dreaded result an impossibility without showing anyone what you feared?"

"I think so," said Paul, slowly. "If you have discovered any possible motive for Mr. White's conduct, and will tell it me, I should never let him know I was aware of his aims, even while I did my utmost to circumvent them."

"Good! I think you are to be trusted. What is Miss Carew's Christian name?"

"Ivy. No, stay! Her name is really Helena Dorothea, only she is never called so."

Very, very grave grew John Milton's face.

"I don't like it," he muttered to himself. "I have said over and over again I'd have number five of our rules cancelled. I wish it had been done sooner."

Then, seeming for the first time to remember Paul's presence, he read out slowly,—

"December 18th. Policy of fifty thousand pounds on the life of Helena Dorothea Carew, minor, now under the guardianship of George White, of Coningsby-street, Insurer, the said George White."

Paul looked at his companion breathlessly.

"What does it mean?" for his brain seemed going round and round.

He could not realise the import of what he heard.

"It means," said Milton, simply, "that Mr. White has insured Miss Carew's life for fifty thousand pounds. Come, Mr. Beresford, remember your promise. We

may suspect foul play, but we must keep our fears to ourselves. White may be hard up—I have often suspected he was not so rich as people make out; but murder is a very risky thing, and I don't think he'd try his hand at it."

Paul was incapable of speech.

"Remember, Miss Carew is young, and in the best of health; he could not make away with her without drawing suspicion on himself, and, besides, I confess I never fancied the man. But we've no right to set him down as a murderer without any proof."

"I am certain of it," came from Paul's white lips. "His clerk confessed to me to-day she had been ailing for weeks, and no one knew exactly what was the matter with her. He has hidden her from me, and is doing her to death slowly and imperceptibly."

Mr. Milton looked bewildered.

"Most men would laugh at you, sir. I can't; but I assure you, you take too serious a view of the case."

"Too serious when he has fifty thousand pounds to gain by her death—and he is, you admit, hard up!"

"But he was curious about her health long before he insured her life. He must have had an interest in her before."

Paul shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't stop to search for his other motives. This one is sufficient. He is a man who loves money beyond aught else, and my darling's death would give him fifty thousand pounds."

"Be careful! Breathe but a word of this to anyone in White's interest, and he will prosecute you for defamation of character. If you want to defeat him, use his own weapons—caution and craft. Just remember he has law on his side. Miss Carew is a minor, and under his guardianship. If you want to rescue her from his clutches you must be wary."

"I should like to get a warrant for his arrest!"

"What on?"

"Attempted murder!"

Milton laughed.

"Because Miss Carew has a cold! Oh! young man, how rash you are! He would bring forward proofs that he had consulted an eminent doctor, and was carrying out his instructions. You would be asked to sustain your accusations, and would have to own it was just a lover's fear."

"But what am I to do?"

"Come home and dine with me. It's no use starving yourself. If you want to help Miss Carew you'll need all your strength. You can do nothing until you have found out where White has hidden your fiancée. You say you are to see him on Monday!"

"But this is only Friday."

Milton was not a hard man. He pitied the poor young man heartily.

"I'll call round at the office to-morrow, and see if they'll give me the address, but I doubt it. I don't think White fancies me any more than I do him. Anyway, you'd better come home and dine with me. It may be of use to you."

"I am sure your advice will help me!" said Paul, gratefully; "and there are a great many things about the case I have not told you yet."

"You shall tell me after dinner, but it is my son-in-law I expect who will be your best help; he is one of the cleverest men going—a doctor by profession, but I really think he's quick at anything. He has been in the East for a great many years; there he married my little girl, and came home to practise as a consulting physician. I am a sad wanderer myself, but when I am in England I pitch my tent with Mary and her husband. I don't believe I could love a son

of my own better than I do Marcus Ward."

Times had changed, indeed, with our old acquaintance since the days when he lived in Primrose-street, and found it a hard struggle to make both ends meet. Fortune may have been tardy in smiling on him, but she smiled with no half measure at last. Mark was barely forty, and his name was known as a physician of no mean fame. He made his thousands easily, kept a carriage for his wife, and surrounded his pretty children with every comfort.

Mrs. Ward, erst Mary Wilton, was a charming woman of twenty-nine, over head and ears in love with her husband, although their eldest child was nearly ten. All London could not have produced a home more replete with family love and honest domestic happiness; and yet in spite of his success and triumphs, there was nothing hard or pretentious about Marcus Ward. He was as attentive to the gratis patients who flocked to him two mornings a week before eleven as to a Duchess in her carriage. Perhaps it was the memory of those bygone days which made him so pitiful and kind to the poor.

Mr. Milton introduced his protégé as a young friend in great perplexity. "I want you to talk to him after dinner, Mark, and I've told him Molly won't mind his frock coat."

Mrs. Ward smiled, and assured Paul they were the most unceremonious people in the world; then with true tact she avoided all reference to his unexpected arrival or to his evident anxious state, and only showed herself conscious his visit was no ordinary one by saying to her husband when she left the dining-room, "There is a nice fire in the library; I shall send you coffee in there."

"You had better tell your own story," said Mr. Milton, when the three men were seated comfortably in the library. "I'll answer for Mark; he'll help you if he can."

"My father-in-law takes rather too high a view of my powers, but I assure you I will do my best. You can't need my aid professionally, for though you look troubled I can see that, physically, you are quite independent of doctors and their remedies."

Paul told his story very simply. He went far more into detail than he had done at the "Security office," mentioned the supposed cablegram, and his own alleged refusal to come from Edinburgh.

"The cablegram is easily settled," returned Mark, promptly. "Cable out to Sir John to know if he sent it. Not that I advise such a course, as it would make him fearfully uneasy, and it seems cruel to arouse the anxiety of a relative at the Antipodes as to Miss Carew's safety. Hold the card in your own hand, but don't play it. If White throws the cablegram in your teeth, tell him you'll wire to Sir John; see how he takes it."

"You're a wonderful head, Mark!" said Mr. Milton, approvingly.

Mark smiled.

"I wish I could dispose of the rest of the case as easily as the cablegram, Mr. Beresford, there are links wanting. I am certain this George White must have known more of the Carew family than you seem to think."

"He took a house of Sir John's near Starham for the summer."

Dr. Ward started.

"You surely don't mean Sir John Fortescue! I never caught the surname before?"

"Yes."

"Sir John Fortescue! Why I knew him when I was Dr. Daniels' assistant. Hugh Ansle and I used to think him our beau idéal of a country gentleman."

"Is it possible you know Mr. Ansle?"

"He was curate at Starham when I was there; but, remember, though I lived in the place three years, I left the place when I was twenty-four, and have never seen it since."

"Mr. Ansle is there now. He is Miss Carew's godfather."

"And Miss Carew is Sir John's niece. Was there not some mystery about her parents? It's so long ago I can't remember; but I think the mother quarrelled with her family."

"There was an estrangement. Dr. Ward, did you ever see Miss Carew?"

"Never. She had left Starham before my time. But Mr. Beresford, I have such pleasant memories of Sir John Fortescue and his wife that I assure you I would do my utmost for their sakes to aid you."

"I wonder Mr. Ansle has never been to see you, Mark," said Mr. Milton. "I don't like to see lapsed friendships."

"Ours lapsed through a singular cause. When I came to London fifteen years ago I meant to make my fortune, but, instead, I nearly starved. After months of disappointment I was called out to a case which caused me at once the deepest interest and the cruellest remorse. My patient was young and beautiful, and there was a strange mystery in her life. I always felt if I could gain her confidence I could save her. She mentioned once that she had lived in Starham—had been married there; and I wrote to Ansle to see if he could aid me in tracing her relations."

"He sent me for answer that I must be mistaken. There was no entry in the register of the marriage of Dora Gresham, and he had never heard the name. I was very young, and I had a vivid interest in my lovely patient. She had a husband I could not like, although he seemed devoted to her, and she herself evidently cared for nothing in the world but her little child."

"She trusted me so far that I witnessed her will, and was allowed to take charge of a letter for her sister, and another for her daughter. At that time I saw no cause to apprehend danger, but her illness was very lingering and I suggested a second opinion. The husband agreed at once."

"The day and hour were fixed for the great physician's visit, when, the night before, I was summoned in hot haste. A change for the worse had set in. I made the utmost speed, but I arrived to find Mrs. Gresham a lifeless corpse."

"As I stood and looked at her cold, white features," said Dr. Ward, with strong emotion: "the truth dawned on me. I knew why her illness had foiled my best efforts; why the suggestion of a second opinion was followed by her death. An older and more experienced doctor would have recognised the presence of digitalis—a poison, I suppose, more subtle and uncertain in its effects than any other. Dora Gresham—or as she signed her name the only time I saw it written, Helen Dorothea Gresham—had been cruelly done to death by small but repeated doses of poison under my very eyes."

Paul started to his feet.

"You said she had a child—a child who was to be sent to her sister's care. Did you hear her name?"

"I did. It was so quaint I have never forgotten it—Ivy."

Beresford was broken-hearted then.

"I see it all!" he cried. "My darling Ivy, or, as the law would term her, Helena Dorothea Carew, is the little child whose mother your skill could not save. I knew that Mrs. Carew married again, and that she died in London. Dr. Ward, should you recognise Mr. Gresham?"

"Unquestionably."

"Then get a glimpse of George White,

the millionaire, and if you can see through his disguise tell me if the man who did the mother so cruelly to death fourteen years ago is not one and the same with the wretch who is now striving to make away with his dead wife's child!"

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1074. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

We shall shortly commence
a Serial Story by an Author
who has written some splendid
Romances for the **LONDON
READER** and whose stories
are highly popular.

TWICE CHOSEN.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LORD AND LADY LYNESTONE.

WHEN Colonel Egerton returned to Lyne-stone he was more thoughtful, more sad, than ever. There was a new vein of bitterness and moroseness in his speeches, and thoughts, which somewhat astonished his hearers; but preparations for the wedding kept them all fully occupied, and they had but little time to analyse the feelings of the cynical Colonel.

After much persuasion, Adela had promised to come a few days before the wedding.

The meeting between the friends was a very warm one, and Rosamond talked to Adela about Lord Carruthers without reserve, letting her know fully that she was aware of the love for her, which had existed so long in his heart.

They were together in the chamber prepared for Adela when suddenly the Countess seized both hands and looked into her face. "Adela, if Lord Lynestone had known that his nephew loved a girl like you, who would have cherished the old place, and followed out his wishes, I doubt very much whether he would ever have married," she said, earnestly.

"Who said his nephew loved me?" asked Adela, her voice shaking with agitation.

"I have never told you so, Rosamond."

"No, but he has."

"He! when?" she gasped.

"Nearly a month ago, when he first arrived in England. He came down to try and prevent my marrying Reginald, being under some misapprehension that he had behaved badly to you."

"How very unfortunate!" said the girl.

"Not at all; when they met he found he had made a mistake. By-the-by, Adela, who was the gentleman whom he mistook for Lord Carruthers?"

Poor Adela covered her face with her hands, and when she removed them she was very white.

"Rosamond, what did he tell you?" she asked, with sudden calmness. "I cannot lose your good opinion."

"He told me that you and he were engaged, and that he loved you dearly, and believed in your affection for him, but that you held clandestine meetings with another, whom he supposed to be Lord Carruthers;

that he had heard words of love between you, and had seen him give you love letters."

"Did you believe this of me, Rosamond?" she asked with feeling.

"No, Adela! Both Reginald and I feel sure you can give some explanation, however black it looked against you."

"You shall have it," she answered, with feeling, "because you trusted me. It was Horace Lake. You know we have been friends from childhood, but perhaps you do not know that for a long time his love for Lillian Freemantle was a prohibited thing."

"Yes, I knew that too; she told me what an angel you had been to her in her trouble."

"She did not tell you all I suffered for her sake," replied Adela, with a sad smile, "for she did not know it herself! I never told her why Cecil and I parted."

"Why was it, dear?"

"I used to do Mercury for them, and convey their love letters, and Cecil surprised Horace and me together, and Horace dropped a part of one of his letters to Lillian, and Cecil picked it up, and naturally it seemed to him to have been written to me."

"Did you not tell him that it was not?"

"Yes; I asked him to trust me, and he couldn't. He would not be satisfied without an explanation of everything, which I could not give him, for of course I could not betray Lillian's confidence; and, Rosamond, it seems as if fate were against me. We met again at Mentone, and Horace was with me; and only a few days since we met once more at my father's grave, and Horace was there too, for he had carried down my flowers."

"Well, dear, you may meet again, and if so, you surely will tell him the truth; it cannot hurt Lillian now."

"Gladly would I if he were to ask me; but I could not volunteer such information. It would be like asking him to come back to me."

"And suppose you did ask him! He loves you!"

"It is very easy to say that, Rose; but put yourself in my place. If Lord Carruthers had misjudged and mistrusted you, would you do it?"

"I am afraid I shouldn't," she confessed, "but I should be very miserable."

"So have I been, Heaven knows!"

"Poor girl! Well, there is nothing so soothing as a cup of tea. Come into my boudoir, and we will finish our talk."

Lord Carruthers joined them later, and a friendly greeting took place between them. Then they parted to dress for dinner.

Adela looked very beautiful as she entered the drawing-room, with her half-cut dress-body of black crape and white lisse, in startling relief against her fair neck, without an ornament of any sort, save a bunch of scarlet mountain ash-berries, which the Countess had pinned upon her left shoulder.

Lady Lynstone was sitting upon the sofa in earnest conversation with Cecil Egerton, and Adela had advanced far into the apartment before she noticed who her companion was.

When she did so she stopped, and involuntarily pressed her hand against her heart to still its wild pulsation, and would have fled but for the Countess's detaining voice.

"I am glad to bring old friends together," she said, in her pleasant, easy way. "You have not met for some time," she asserted.

"Pardon me. Miss Thorndyke and I have met very often lately."

"Of course. How stupid I am! Why

you told me only this afternoon that you and Cecil met at your father's grave when you and Horace Lake were carrying flowers there!"

"Horace Lake!" he repeated, with a strange look. "I had certainly seen the young man before, but I was uncertain who he was."

"The young man!" laughed the countess.

"Why, Cecil, one would think he had come down to measure you for a new coat, to hear your scornful accents. Horace Lake is a fine young fellow, and thoroughly nice, and more—he is as true as steel. Did you ever meet Lillian Freemantle? Well, he has been engaged to her ever since they were boy and girl together, and his constancy was wonderful through the roughest weather; for her stern parent would not let her see or speak to him. But dear Adela stood by them through thick and thin; and even managed to wheedle Sir Richard, who was said to be adamant, into forgiving her, and permitting the engagement."

"When are they going to be married, Adela?"

"In the Spring," she answered, in a low voice.

"Well, you can tell Colonel Egerton the rest, dear, for I must ask you to excuse me one moment. My son won't sleep unless I go and kiss him before dinner," and Lady Lynstone was across the room and out of the door before either of them could stop her.

"Adela, is this all true?" asked Cecil Egerton, standing before her, and looking full into her wonderful steadfast eyes.

"It is all true," she answered, meeting his gaze fully.

"Then in Heaven's name, why have we been all these weary years apart?" he cried passionately.

"Because you had no faith in me," she replied, with quivering lips; "and if the years have been weary ones to you they have been equally so to me, Cecil."

"Adela, why did you not tell me?" he continued, with feeling. "See how our lives have been wasted and spoilt."

"I could not tell you. I could not betray the confidence of others. They trusted me Cecil."

"We shall never misunderstand each other again, Scamp," he said, softly, as he stooped and kissed her.

"I hope not, Cecil; I could not bear much more, and I fear you will find all the Scamp in me gone—the old name has well-nigh fallen into disuse now."

"It will all come back when you are happy, dearest, and it shall be my pleasure to make you so, believe me."

"I do," she said, gently, looking up at him with a smile.

"Darling let it be a double wedding! Rosamond would be very pleased, and I could take my wife back with me to Malta."

"No, Cecil, it could not be so soon. I should not like to leave my mother at such short notice. If you want me, you must wait a little."

"Darling! do you really love me still!" he asked earnestly.

"If I had not loved you still, Cecil, should I have 'Twice Chosen' you? she asked, with a smile. "Is there not the old leaven of mistrust in your question?"

"Adela, you do not know how I love you," he said, passionately. "It is essential to my happiness to feel that I am the one man in the world for you, and that you could not wed any other."

"Cecil, dear!" she replied, softly, laying her hand upon his, confidently; "had it been possible that any other could be caught to me, I should have married long

ago. I have been sorely tempted, but I could not put aside love for worldly advantage. If I could have forgotten you, and our plighted troth, I should not be free now."

"Thank Heaven that you could not," he murmured, fervently; "but dear one, what will you make me happy?"

"If you will return with me to Winsor, we will settle that with mother," she said kindly, and the Countess entered the room with Lord Carruthers.

"Rosamond, how shall I ever thank you?" said Colonel Egerton, going forward to meet her. "I see that you planned this meeting!"

"I did—that is, we did," she laughed, with a bright confiding glance at Lord Carruthers. "We thought it so sad that you and Adela should both be miserable, when you might be so very happy; but we had to go very quietly to work, or we should have scared her away. She had no idea you were here, till you met in this room."

"And now I want her to marry me at once, but she says no."

"Perhaps she wishes to prove your faith in her, for the sake of her own future happiness," said Lady Lynstone, wickedly.

"She need not be afraid," returned Cecil, "I will never risk losing her again."

"Hear, hear!" laughed the Countess.

"Adela, dear, do not forget that."

"I shall not," replied the girl, in a low voice, slipping her hand into that of her friend, "and I am so happy!"

The marriage of Lady Lynstone and Lord Carruthers was, as they had decided, a very quiet one, but at the same time it was a remarkably pretty affair. As a widow she had no bridesmaids; but Adela, for once dressed in grey, held her bouquet and gloves.

There were no tears, and very few invited guests. The Duke of St. Ives after all gave away the bride, to set Lord Egerton at liberty to be Lord Carruthers' best man.

Colonel Egerton accompanied Adela to Winsor, and was warmly welcomed by Mrs. Thorndyke as her future son-in-law. If one pang of regret shot through her heart with the idea of parting with Adela, and living the rest of her life in solitude, she did not let her know it.

The news of Miss Thorndyke engagement spread quickly through the neighbourhood, and was heard with vastly different feelings by her friends. It was settled that she and Lillian should be married upon the first day of spring, and Cecil returned meanwhile to take the command of his regiment at Malta, thinking the intervening months an eternity.

They ran by quickly with Adela—she had so much to do preparing her trousseau, and so many things to think about.

The old troubled look had gradually passed away from her beautiful face, and she was daily growing more like the Scamp of yore. March came round again, and with it the wedding-day of both Lillian and Adela.

For many weeks Sir Richard and Mr. Lake had held long and earnest consultations, which evidently had afforded the man of law satisfaction, and on the eve of the wedding-day Horace and Lillian were to sign the marriage settlements, Mrs. Thorndyke and Adela being invited to be present as witnesses.

"Lillian," said her father, with feeling, "I hope the arrangements which I have made, and which Mr. Lake has carried out for me, will meet with your approval, and that they will be for the happiness of both you and Horace. As for you," he continued, giving his future son-in-law a sharp slap on the back, "I have no son of my own, so you

must be one to me. I can't think of your running away with Lillian for longer than the honeymoon. Your future name, my boy, will be Horace Lake Freemantle, and if interest can get the old title conferred upon you at my death, it shall be done; otherwise it will lapse at my demise, as there are no male Freemantles left—I have outlived my race. For the rest, I have divided my property now, so that I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I have made others happier. For Lillian and Adela, my real daughter, and my daughter in affection, I have drawn out deeds of gifts for thirty thousand pounds each, to render them independent of their husbands," he added, pinching Lillian's cheek.

"Five thousand I have given to Mrs. Thorndyke, to help her keep up the old Rectory, and thirty thousand to Master Horace, to render him independent of his wife and me, upon the understanding that he takes my name as I have before said, and makes his home with me at Marsden Hall."

"Oh! father, how generous you are!" cried Lillian.

"Sir Richard," said Horace, "you have not taken the wind out of my sails, but you have filled them so suddenly with fortune's best breezes that you have fairly overturned my powers of speech. I am proud indeed to bear your time-honoured name, and it shall be my earnest endeavour never to tarnish it."

The following morning Sir Richard tapped early at his daughter's door.

"Are you up, Lillian?" he asked.

"Yes, papa, up and dressed, and alone. Won't you come in?"

"No, dear I want you to come with me," and he led her to the oratory, and opened the door.

"We must share everything from henceforth, darling," he said. "I have had a second key made for you, it is my wedding present, Lillian. You will from now, I hope be able to realize what your mother was to me, by the light of your own love for your husband. This is your mother's picture in life, and her effigy in death, my child! They have been my best-loved companions. Visit them now when you like—let them be yours too," and kissing her fondly he left her alone with her mother's likeness.

Tears rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"How very, very lovely!" she murmured. "Oh! mother, if you had only lived! What have I not lost in you!"

Half-an-hour later she returned to her bedroom, pale, but peaceful and quiet.

The church bells rang out.

It was a gala for the whole parish, and the bishop of the diocese was to marry the two couples, three of whom were prime favourites in the neighbouring country side.

Six weeks later, Horace and Lillian were receiving their visitors at Marsden Hall, and Adela the adulation of the officers of her husband's regiment at Malta.

The following Christmas a strange and unlooked for change came.

Lady Carruthers had become the mother of another little boy, and when he was but a few days' old, her bonnie blue-eyed son died suddenly of croup; and was buried long before she was allowed to hear the sad truth.

Thus Lynstone passed away from her, and became the property of Colonel Egerton, who was Colonel Egerton no longer, but Lord Lynstone of Lynstone.

And Lord Carruthers took his wife to Warminster Towers as soon as she was strong enough to travel, tender as a woman to her in her sorrow.

The loss of the little Viscount was a terrible blow to Lady Carruthers; but with her husband's arm about her waist, and her baby's plump arms round her neck, she soon learned to be happy again.

[THE END.]

UNSEEN FIRES.

BY EFFIE ADELAIDE ROWLANDS.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Valentine Eyre is riding through a forest in Spain when his attention is arrested by the sight of the beautiful gipsy girl Zitella. Valentine ascertains that she is betrothed to Heriann, a member of the gipsy band, and he would spare her if possible from a loveless marriage. Zitella disguised as a peasant boy brings Valentine news of Heriann's intention to kill him, and as Zitella's action has made it impossible for her to return to her old life, Valentine undertakes to adopt her, and she is sent to England to be educated. Valentine's wife is reported dead, and Zitella has complicated matters by marrying, although she parted from her husband at the church door. Zitella's education being completed she determines to use the influence of Valentine's position and power to further her own ambitious ends.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY FITZROY could talk of nothing but Zitella. She was delighted at the prospect of presenting London with a new beauty. She considered that Valentine Eyre had done her an honour in entrusting his ward to her care.

The clever woman of the world felt justified in predicting the most brilliant future for the young *débütante*, who had all the advantages of youth, loveliness, and a most romantic history.

Blanche Hastings listened with well-concealed anger and mortification to endless plans for her rival's future.

She did not hate Zitella because she was young and lovely,—Blanche was too beautiful to bear comparison with any other. She would not have grudged the girl a royal duke could she have secured one, but she did grudge her Valentine Eyre.

None guessed that the cold, haughty Miss Hastings had loved that man for long years, with a love as devoted and intense as it was hopeless.

So Lady Fitzroy dilated on the sensation which her *protégée* could not fail to create—never dreamed that every word was like a dagger thrust in the heart of her listener.

Blanche, thinking silence was her only safeguard, set her pearly white teeth together, conversing only with well-bred smiles of assent, while she felt that compared to this torture Zitella's presence would be an actual relief. She felt almost glad when she heard that Miss Czarvas was to arrive on the following afternoon.

Never had Zitella looked lovelier than when she entered the drawing-room of Lady Fitzroy's splendid house in Bolgrave-square.

She had left her school for ever. A splendid future lay before her, and her brain and heart were full of thoughts which gave added grace to her step and form, a heightened glow to her exquisite cheek, and a more intense depth and darkness to her wonderful eyes.

She was also attired in garments which a princess might have sighed to wear; but the dainty plumes, the costly velvet and lace, seemed but the smallest items of this girl's marvellous beauty.

She entered the drawing-room with an air of graceful self-possession, which charmed

Lady Fitzroy, and drove Blanche to despair. The girl was high bred, and lovely beyond all fancy, and Valentine loved her.

Miss Hastings' heart died within her; but as she took a second glance at her rival she entertained a belief that Zitella was careless and frivolous.

Her head would soon be turned by the adulation of society, and then (Blanche breathed hard), might she not hope that the girl would turn from Valentine to some higher prize?

While these thoughts sped through Blanche's mind, Lady Fitzroy was greeting her guest in the most affectionate manner. She took Zitella's daintily-gloved hands between her own, kissed her lips, and expressed a hope that the dear child had not quite forgotten her journey from Spain three years ago. Zitella, having made an appropriate reply, was led forward and introduced to Blanche, who smiled and uttered pretty words in her usual well-bred fashion, while hatred and pain raged like fierce fires in her heart.

Lady Fitzroy looked on, delighted that her two special *protégées* should be friends. She never saw below the surface, and dreamed not that all this effusion of cordiality was but a mask for mutual and deep-rooted antagonism.

Blanche's hatred of Zitella deepened as the moments passed. This girl had won the love for which she would have died, and as she looked on the beautiful southern face she could not wonder. She knew herself to be a beautiful woman, but she knew, too, that she might as well ask a farthing candle to eclipse the sun in brightness, as hope that her beauty might live beside the glowing loveliness, the dangerous power of fascination, which dwelt in Zitella's every glance and motion.

Oh! if she could only find one blemish; but the form, in its flowing draperies of rich black lace and velvet, was perfect; and she felt bound to confess that if the face could be out rivalled it would be by those rich masses of amber hair which lay coiled, sleek and shining like yellow snakes, round the head, which an empress could not have carried more proudly.

Blanche Hastings set her teeth hard, and with a fierce heart-pang came the wild desire to wound or insult her rival in some way. The means came with the will, and she said, smiling sweetly—

"I have heard of you under so many names, Don Leon, then Sobieska, and Czarvas. It is—er—very confusing!"

Zitella's face betrayed nothing. She answered with a smile—

"Czarvas is the name to which I have best right. I find, on looking over some letters of my father, that ten years before his exile and death the Countship of Czarvas was conferred on him by a grateful Government. The letters have been for years in the keeping of my nurse and foster-mother, who delivered them up to me the other day."

"How deliciously romantic!" smiled Blanche. "But what strange vicissitudes you have had!"

Blanche's speech was not finished, for at that moment some visitors were announced, and there was necessarily a suspension of hostilities; but Blanche never removed her eyes from her rival's face. A certain expression or attitude of Zitella's had caught on her fancy, and like a flash of lightning came the conviction that she had seen the girl before, and under unusual circumstances.

But where?

Blanche Hastings was still asking herself this question, when, that night, she disrobed herself in her own room. She was certain her previous knowledge of Zitella

was not due to some passing glimpses in the street, or at any fashionable assembly. She might have seen Zitella at a theatre or in some crowded picture-gallery; but she felt sure that the face was connected with some incident which at the time impressed, but now escaped her memory, and, so thinking, Blanche Hastings at last fell asleep.

When she awoke the next morning Blanche Hastings was still thinking of Zitella, nor did the events of the day offer any distraction of her thoughts; but another wakeful night failed to furnish the link which was wanting in Blanche's memory. Valentine Eyre had ridden with Zitella in the afternoon of that day, had eaten his dinner by her side, and enjoyed the opera afterwards, in the same, to him, delightful proximity—to the utter misery of one woman and the envy of every man who caught a glimpse of Lady Fitzroy's box.

Thinking of these things made Blanche toss all night on a sleepless pillow; and on the following day, feeling that she must unburden her mind to somebody, she wrote a letter to a friend who had been cut off by bereavement from the pleasures of the London season.

In a few days the answer arrived—half-a-dozen sheets full of nothing in particular, but there was one portion which happened to possess the most vital interest for the reader.

It was this:—

"I return the photograph, and must confess that the girl is perfectly lovely, but I have seen both it and the original before, and so have you—at least the original—and I wonder you can forget. Do you remember New Haugh last summer? I am sure you can recall an evening, when driving back from Lady Chetwynd's party, we saw a pair walking in the shadow of the Firley Grange woods.

"The girl made an impression on you because of her beauty, the man on me because of his resemblance to the Marquis of Eastshire. Now, my dear, prepare yourself for a surprise. That man was Egerton St. George, the Marquis's scapegrace brother. The girl was Zitella Czarvas—the new beauty. I met Sir George about three weeks ago, and remembering the New Haugh episode, questioned him about it. He denied ever having been near the place. But I happened to see a photograph of Miss Czarvas in his possession; and when he saw that I was convinced he confessed that it was some little school-girl with whom he had picked up an acquaintance.

"By-the-by, if you go to the New Gallery you will see a picture of Egerton St. George's—'A Summer Idyll.' I fancy he told me it was called, by Hugo Brand, or Bond—I forget which. St. George's prospects were very gloomy when he took to painting, because his brother had refused to pay his Newmarket losses; but the Marquis has since then not only relented but developed symptoms of rapid consumption, so the scapegrace has gone off to Spain in high spirits to avoid his creditors and wait for the title."

The letter ran on in this manner; but Blanche Hastings read no more just then.

She sat down, and, leaning her cheek on her hand, remained in an attitude of puzzled thought. The story had given her an advantage over her rival of which she had never dreamed; but she knew not how far she might turn it to account, nor did she dare to hope for too much, for, after all, her informant might be mistaken.

But Blanche was resolved on some immediate plan of action. So she rose, and went downstairs, seeing no way before her, but prepared to guide her conduct as circumstances should direct.

She found Lady Fitzroy and Zitella alone

in the drawing room—the latter in ecstasies over a casket of gems, which were her lover's latest gift.

They were some diamonds which had come to Valentine from his mother, and he had had them reset for his betrothed.

As Blanche entered Zitella was putting on a magnificent tiara before one of the mirrors, and as the priceless gems flashed and sparkled above the matchless tresses they cut the heart of the bolder as if it were glass.

Zitella came dancing towards her rival, the stones gleaming and sparkling on her neck and arms.

"Are they not lovely?" she cried. "It was so sweet of Valentine to bring them; I shall wear them to-night at Lady Dene's."

Blanche's lips paled in their effort to utter words which should not betray her jealousy.

"They become you so well," she murmured at last. "It is a pity Mr. Eyre is not a duke! You ought to be a duchess, or a marchioness at least. Diamonds and titles," she added, smiling, "should only be bestowed on those who can add lustre to them."

"How sweet of you! But, indeed, you overrate me, and I am quite content to be Mrs. Eyre; but I hope, dear Blanche, you will win a title."

As Zitella spoke her impulse was to fling her arms round her companion's neck; but she was repulsed by Blanche, who turned away, saying coldly,—

"Mr. Eyre would grudge your caresses, I think, were he to see how lovely you look in those jewels. Why is he not here?"

Zitella's face at once assumed a regretful expression.

"Oh is it not tiresome? I was so absorbed in these lovely gems that for the moment I forgot my annoyance; but Valentine has left me for a few days. He merely came now to present this gift and say farewell. He has been summoned to his father, who is ill."

Blanche's heart beat wildly. What could be more opportune for the success of her plans than Valentine's absence? Circumstance seemed already to be playing into her hands; but it was in the most natural tone that she consoled with Zitella on the temporary loss of her lover.

"Yes! is it not most tiresome?" assented Zitella. "You know we were to have gone to Mr. Steele's *matinée* this afternoon. Then there was Signor Dulcetto's *soirée* and Lady Dene's dance afterwards. Now I shall not enjoy any of these events the least little bit."

"It will be so hot at the *matinée*," said Blanche, taking up a large fan, and waving it gracefully. "And we have got stalls, have we not? Of course, Mr. Eyre got stalls; he knew that in a box you would be besieged between the acts!"

Zitella laughed, as she held up her arm towards the light to catch the sparkle of the gems which enlapsed it.

"Poor Val!" she murmured. "I half promised him that I would not fold any of these engagements, and I think I shall keep my promise—at least, about the *matinée*."

"Did Mr. Eyre ask you not to go out?" queried Blanche, with a supercilious elevation of her delicately pencilled eyebrows.

"Yes! You seem surprised that he should make such a request!"

"Frankly, I am. I thought Mr. Eyre's freedom from the least spark of jealousy amounted almost to indifference."

Zitella's face flushed, and there was an angry glitter in her dark eyes.

"Then you do not know him," was her quick retort. "My betrothed is as jealous as a Moor or a Spaniard. You know his

mother was a Castilian, and he is supposed to resemble her strongly. I should not like to trifle with Valentine," and she laughed slightly. "I could imagine him taking his revenge in the good old way," and she drew one pretty jewelled hand with a significant gesture across her slender throat.

"What a horrible idea!" shuddered Blanche, "and how very inconvenient for you. In that case," she added, smiling, "I think we had better forego Mr. Steele's *matinée*."

"I mean to forego it," replied Zitella, who had long ago made up her mind on the subject. "But what are we to do?" she added, gaily. "We must go somewhere. I cannot feast my eyes on these gems all day!"

"Let us do a round of the galleries," suggested Blanche. "I know you have been there before, but there is a picture which I particularly wish to see."

"What a happy suggestion!" rejoined Zitella, winding one jewelled arm round her friend's neck. "I adore pictures; but when Valentine took me round my attention was diverted between him and the walls. To-day I shall give no thought to anything but the pictures."

Blanche, by a swift movement, extricated herself from the unwelcome embrace of her companion's arm.

"Your caresses are very sweet!" she said, lightly. "But look in that mirror, your radiant colouring makes me look positively hideous."

"You would not dare to breathe so gross a libel on any other face," cried Zitella.

Then, with light laughter, the two girls separated to equip for their afternoon amusement.

"London has not grown accustomed to you yet, Zitella. See how you are being stared at. There is an old flame of mine, Evelyn Danvers. He does not even see me because of you."

"I am indifferent to the gaze of the multitude. I have come to see the pictures."

"And so have I," retorted Blanche, as they moved into the north room of the New Gallery. "But what an indifferent collection, and I wish they would put the names on the pictures! Catalogues are such a bore. You are so energetic, dear; look out for one hundred and twenty-one. I think it must be the one that I want to see."

Zitella turned to the number required, and read, in a clear, unfaltering voice,—

"A Summer Idyll," by Hugo Brand.

"Ah! I thought so! I knew the mountains and that copse. It is a portion of my uncle's estate at New Haugh; but how vague and inappropriate the title! I expected something much more suggestive. Really I can't conceive why such poor work should have been accepted; but I believe the Marquis of Eastshire was potent—"

"The Marquis of Eastshire!" interrupted Zitella, and there was the very slightest tremor in her voice.

Blanche smiled slightly as she replied,—

"This is Lord Egerton St. George's picture; he is a brother of the Marquis of Eastshire. Hugo Brand is only an assumed name."

"No, I don't think much of the work or of the painter either, though by Jove it is more than I expected of St. George, but it proves, after all, that the worst of us have some spark of the divine. There is a touch of poetry about that sunset."

As Zitella slowly recovered from her first surprise she caught these words uttered in her immediate vicinity.

Two or three men, overhearing the girls' conversation, turned, inspired by a sudden desire to see this particular picture.

"St. George has gone to Spain, I believe," remarked another.

"So much the worse for Spain," was the comprehensive but cautious rejoinder.

"Poor Eastshire is not a bad fellow."

"He is good enough to be no relation to St. George; but I heard yesterday that his life is only a question of months. I could almost wish, for the sake of the peerage, that an untimely wind would sweep St. George to his proper sphere before then."

"Who's the next heir to the title?"

"Churchill Penance—a capital fellow! I daresay you know him."

"Rather. We were chums at Eton, and wrangled for honours at Lazarus. We pulled in the same boat, belonged to the same coaching club, and were even rusticated together. Best old chap in the world is Churchill; but I never heard him mention any connection with the Marquis of Eastshire."

"No, I should think you would not. The Marquis is not a bad fellow in his own way, but he and Churchill Penance would have little in common; they are near cousins. All the same, though, Churchill does not seem to have inherited the family constitution."

The two men moved off, and Blanche's interest in the pictures languished visibly; but Zitella also seemed tired as they passed into another room. She complained of a headache, which apparently prompted Blanche to suggest tea and home.

"I think I shall eschew all gaieties for this evening," said Zitella as she entered the hansom which she and her companion had chosen in preference to Lady Fitzroy's carriage.

"Cruel girls, you do not consider society. An earthquake would be less fatal to the success of to-night's entertainments than your absence. But what will London say?"

"It may say that I am too much in love with my betrothed to enjoy anything in his absence," and Zitella smiled like an angel, while her dark eyes, glowing with a rapture of such tenderness that even her companion was deceived.

"Ingrate," she murmured; "the world worships you, and you are callous to its pain!"

"I have only one world; but here we are. How short the drive has seemed," replied Zitella, as the hansom drew up before the door of Lady Fitzroy's house in Belgrave-square.

A foreign ambassador dined at Lady Fitzroy's that evening, and was studiously devoted to Blanche, who received his attentions with a coldness which seemed to have the effect of eliciting more fervent worship from the ambassador.

But he was not the only company, for there was Charlie Beresford, a professional dinner-out, and one of those men who, having elected themselves charge d'affaires of London society, are always able to tell you the last unpublished thing about anybody and everybody.

Zitella had not been five minutes in Charlie's society before she divined that he was a handbook to general information. She therefore smiled her sweetest upon him; and having adroitly turned the conversation in that direction, soon found out all that there was to be told of the Marquis of Eastshire's family, and also the exact part of Spain which Lord Egerton St. George was supposed to be contaminating by his presence at that moment.

Charlie Beresford was never cautious in his remarks on people, but deference to his audience prevented him painting Lord Egerton St. George in his proper hue; still, the portrait which he presented was so very black that Zitella exclaimed in shocked, sad tones,—

"I have always associated noble deeds with noble birth, but if Lord Egerton is all you say I am sorry for him; but his brother's death may reform him. Of course he will return to England then."

"The ten plagues of Egypt would not reform St. George," replied Charlie Beresford, excitedly. "But I think it will be some time before he shows his face in London again. He knows well that there are at least three clubs that meditate asking him to withdraw his name."

"I daresay he will find means of enjoyment in Spain," was Zitella's careless rejoinder.

"I have no doubt of it," muttered the other. "Like his Satanic Majesty, St. George finds opportunities everywhere!"

Zitella did not choose to hear this remark; but reply was just then inexpedient, for the moment of withdrawal had arrived. Charlie Beresford had risen from his chair as he spoke, and as he held the door open for the ladies to pass through he bent forward, and whispered in Zitella's ear,—

"You will give me at least one dance to-night? I shall turn up for that alone."

She smiled encouragingly. She would not be at Lady Dene's, but she did not choose to say so just then.

Lady Fitzroy was exceedingly provoked when, in the drawing-room, Zitella announced her intention to remain at home that night.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed with unusual energy, "it is absurd, preposterous, cruel!"

"It may be all this to you, Lady Fitzroy; but Valentine will be pleased that I have not gone out."

"But what am I to say to Lady Dene? What excuse am I to make?"

"You need not make any excuse. Say simply that I refused to go out in the absence of my betrothed."

Blanche Hastings laughed slightly; Lady Fitzroy's face was a study.

"My dear Zitella!" she exclaimed, in horrified tones, "it would be better to announce you a sudden victim to scarlet fever than convey such an excuse as that!"

But Zitella resisted all Lady Fitzroy's appeals, even when they were strengthened by the arguments and appeals of Charlie Beresford, who had made great haste to join the ladies in the drawing-room.

"How can I leave you alone?" exclaimed Lady Fitzroy at last, seeing that Zitella was not to be moved.

"Dear Lady Fitzroy, I shall be quite happy. I have got a new novel to read and letters to write, you know," and she looked very lovely in a sudden assumption of languor. "I have been accustomed to early hours, and I am yet scarcely acclimatised to vanity fair."

"Mr. Eyre should be happy," rejoined Lady Fitzroy, and as she spoke the butler entered with the announcement that my lady's carriage was waiting.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for a day.

But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel enlivens not May."

"HAS my son come yet, Martin?"

"Mr. Valentine cannot possibly be here, sir, for another hour at least."

Vybian Eyre twisted about on his pillows, and turned his pinched and peevish face to the wall.

"Go and look out again, Martin."

The servant was prompt to obey the command; but, returning almost immediately, announced that there was no sign of any vehicle approaching.

"A dutiful son is mine, indeed!" mut-

tered the sick man bitterly. "He knows I am dying, and he leaves me to the mercy of strangers."

The servant, who heard these words, might have been hurt, for he had given Vybian Eyre thirty years of faithful service; but these thirty years had injured him to ingratitude, and so, drawing the broadened curtains close together, he suggested that his master should sleep.

But, with an angry hand, Vybian frustrated Martin's design for his comfort. Starting up in bed he tore the curtains apart, exclaiming in irritable tones,—

"Confound it! Shall I see so many more suns that you wish to deprive me of the little light which is left?"

He sank back on his pillow, breathing with difficulty, for this paroxysm of anger had exhausted his feeble strength; and Martin, after one glance at the face on the pillow, turned away to stifle a sigh—for his master, disliked cordially by others, was very dear to him.

"A dutiful son is mine," repeated Vybian Eyre. "What right has he to be away in London wasting his substance, while this place is going to the dogs?"

Martin might have reminded his master that it was he, Valentine's own father, who had driven the young man from the place; but recriminations were not very much in his way, and, as before, he refrained.

As he watched Martin arranging some medicine bottles and glasses on the table a suspicious look darted into Vybian Eyre's cold and sunken eyes, giving him a still more evil and disagreeable expression than he had before possessed.

"I believe my son was never apprised of my state!" he exclaimed, in a voice so shrill and sudden that Martin was startled, and shattered a small phial in his anxiety.

Vybian Eyre was firmly convinced that this was an acknowledgment of the man's guilt, and he almost sprang from his bed in his excitement and terror.

"Ha! Villain, traitor!" he cried, in hoarse, gurgling tones. "I knew that you were determined that I should die alone, so that you might reap a rich reward. Perhaps—" and his eyes blazed—"you have planned to take my life! How do I know that my son has not conspired with you against me?"

"Father!" cried a voice that moment; and at the unexpected sound Vybian Eyre sank back on his pillows, while Martin, relieved and joyful, advanced to greet Valentine, who had entered unannounced and unheard.

"Father!" repeated the young man, in a voice which was harsh with indignant surprise; and, seeing the young man's evident distress, Martin hastened into a whispered explanation.

"You must not mind my master, Mr. Valentine. He is a little delirious. He hardly knows what he is saying."

"My poor father!" muttered Valentine, as he pressed forward and saw in Vybian Eyre's face the deep, indelible footprints of selfish evil years.

With an anxious glance at Valentine, Martin withdrew, and when they were left alone together the sick man extended his hand to his son, who grasped it with a tenderness which was as undeserved as it was unexpected.

"I am greatly changed, Val."

Vybian Eyre's anger seemed to have died away, and he spoke with a smile which had, however, the effect of distorting his features, and making them more forbidding than before.

"We all change, father!" was his son's reply.

"I daresay you are changed, too? How do you like being a widower, my boy?"

Valentine's face flushed in a sudden thought of Zitelia. He could not speak of her to his father, who had ever denied him the least sympathy, and repulsed his affection until it had almost died out altogether.

Vivian Eyre chuckled as he saw the colour mount to his son's brow. His sunken eyes gleamed as he said, in malicious tones,—

"Ha, ha! Perhaps you like the state so little that you mean to put an end to it? Take my advice, and don't. A wife is always a nuisance, but a second wife—oh, Heaven!"

"Don't you think you had better refrain from talking, sir!" interrupted Valentine, stiffly.

"Confound it, sir!" was the irritable rejoinder. "Why should I? Do you think I brought you down here for the pleasure of looking at you? No; I sent for you because I wanted to talk. I have a confession to make!"

Vivian Eyre, having finished these words, indulged in a series of chuckles, during which Valentine stood with his eyes on the carpet, and in his mind the conviction that his father's brain was wandering.

He could not dream that this unseemly mirth was in anticipation of his own suffering.

"Deathbed confessions are delightful things sometimes, Valentine."

Hearing his father's voice, the young man looked up, and rejoined, in grave tones,—

"It must be always an immense relief when they are over. I can fancy no —"

Vivian interrupted with another chuckle.

"Mine will be a relief to me. I have brooded on it so long, I have derived great enjoyment from the thought of my revenge; but why I put it off until now I cannot tell."

"Your revenge, sir?" said Valentine, in a mystified tone. "I do not understand. On whom do you wish to be revenged?"

The sick man smiled a strange ghastly smile, and the muscles of his face contorted until its expression was simply horrible.

There was a moment's pause, and then on the sill once these words fell,—

"On whom but you, my son, who have always been hateful to me for your mother's sake."

Valentine gasped for breath. He hoped that this was some wild fiction of a disordered brain; but malice was Vivian Eyre's only disorder, and, enjoying his son's astonishment, he went on slowly.

"Listen to me. You've got a brother who has more right to the name of Eyre than you. I was married before ever I knew your mother, and when I wedded her my first wife was alive, and, what is more, I was fully aware of the fact."

"Good Heaven, what infamy!"

The words broke through trembling lips from Valentine's tortured breast. His face was livid as the face of the dead; but Vivian Eyre went on, exulting in his evil power to wound.

"My first wife was a Spanish gipsy, a mere child when I first crossed her path. Oh, Heaven, how lovely she was! To think of her now makes the fires of youth rekindle in my veins. Well, she loved me, and I married her, not intentionally, in a legal manner. I had meant to soothe her fears with a mock marriage, but when accidents frustrated my design, and I felt myself bound for life to Aphra, my love naturally cooled. My gipsy wife became a burden, from which, however, I soon found means to free myself."

"I was unscrupulous, Aphra innocent; and when I told her that our marriage had

been a sham she believed me, and without a word went back, so she said, to die among her own people."

"So, freed in this easy manner from one entanglement, I resolved never to entail myself in another; but I wanted money, and when I met Fredegonde De Nunax I determined that her father's coffers should replenish mine, which a reckless life had emptied faster than I had thought possible."

"In Fredegonde and her haughty old father I found an easy conquest. One only cared that I was handsome, the other that I was nobly born. I saw Fredegonde daily for about a week; then, at the end of that time, I proposed and was accepted, and as the Spaniards are more impulsive than we are, the close of another week saw us married with every detail of pomp and splendour which it is possible to imagine."

"Had I gone to England then," continued Vivian Eyre, "all would have been well; but I remained in Spain, and there before long I met Aphra again. The treachery which had broken the girl's heart had enhanced her beauty ten thousandfold, and the thought that she had been put far from me made her almost dear."

"I revived her faith in me by plausible excuses and lovely words. My task was easy, for Aphra's heart was soft and true; and when I told her that some maddening doubt of her truth had inspired me to tell her a lie about our marriage she believed me, and crept to my arms without a reproach."

Vivian Eyre paused and breathed hard, not in remorse, but the fierce hatred which years had not quenched.

"To keep the secret of my second marriage from Aphra was my first thought," continued Vivian Eyre, "and for some time I kept it so well that neither of my victims suspected anything."

"Aphra, happy in her love and innocence, found her cup of joy full when she became a mother. More weeks rolled by, and still nothing transpired; but this success emboldened me."

"I grew incautious, and aroused Fredegonde's suspicions. She watched me, but in silence, and I saw no breath of the fierce jealousy which burned within her—an all-consuming fire."

"She watched me," repeated Vivian, and a look of hatred swept across his face, distorting his features, "and found full ground for her suspicions. She tracked me to Aphra's abode, but still kept silent, and I knew nothing—nothing until her deadly work was done."

"One day," continued Vivian, "news was brought to me of Aphra's death. I went, and found your mother there, by the corpse, who repeated what I believed to be my wife's dying confession. It was this:

"Between the time of our parting and our second meeting, Aphra believing herself free, had married, and the boy I thought mine belonged to another—a gipsy man, who had already taken the motherless child away. I believed this story until, in this very room, twenty-two years ago, your mother confessed it a falsehood with her dying lips. The revenge which I vowed then is now accomplished. Remember, you have no right to any name but your mother's, and this estate being entailed goes to your brother Hermann. It is your duty to seek him out, and restore that of which your mother robbed him."

Vivian Eyre sank back on his pillows, while a ghastly smile of triumph sat upon his livid features, and the silence which reigned in the room was like unto that of death.

It was at length broken by a single sound—a sound like a sob, more fierce and bitter than a curse.

"It broke from Valentine, who stood trying to realise the blow which had fallen on him, and it was his sole comment on his father's crime."

He stood for a time silent and immovable; then, without another look at the rigid form on the bed, he strode from the room.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1970. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

SOCIETY.

It is definitely decided that there will be no Drawing-rooms this year, so far as the general public is concerned; but it is understood that Courts will be held to receive those who are officially entitled to pay their respects to the new King and Queen.

The will of Queen Victoria has not been published, nor is it at all likely that her private bequests will ever be placed completely before the public. But at present not even those who might reasonably expect some provision for their future have received a hint of what is in store. The Maids of Honour, one at least of whom served the late Queen for thirty years, have received nothing but the six months' notice which is common to the Household. A certain anxiety is excusable. Maids of Honour under the Victorian regime were never wealthy, and therefore the six months' notice cuts off a welcome addition to straightened means.

Two portraits of Queen Victoria are to make a rather unexpected appearance in the forthcoming Academy exhibition. The large-seated portrait of Her Majesty, painted by M. Benjamin Constant, had been promised to the Glasgow Exhibition, but, instead of going there, it will go to Burlington House "by command" of the King. To the same walls his Majesty has decided to contribute the water-colour drawing made of his mother after death by Hubert von Herkomer, R.A. The first idea was that this affecting record should be kept only for the eyes of the Royal Family; but that idea has been foregone in favour of the nation.

ACCORDING to the official programme of the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall to Australia, as approved by Lord Hopetoun and the Commonwealth Government, the Royal yacht *Ophir* is to arrive in Melbourne on May 6th, and remain there until the 17th. Thursday, May 9th, is set apart for the great historic event—the opening of the first Parliament of the Australian Commonwealth by the Duke in the name of the King. The Melbourne engagements of their Royal Highnesses include State dinners at Government House, a levee, a reception, the conferring of degrees at the university, a procession of the associated trades, a grand concert, given by the Commonwealth Government, a military review, and a distribution of prizes to the united public schools of Victoria.

MONDAY, May 15, is reserved for a visit to the famous goldfield Ballarat, "the city of statues," where the Duke will lay the foundation-stone of a monument in memory of the Australian soldiers who have fallen in South Africa. After that ceremony, the Duke will don the suit of a working miner and descend one of the deepest gold mines—not a novel experience to him, as he enjoyed it on his former visit to Australia in company with his late brother, the Duke of Clarence. On the following Thursday the Duke will go up into the bush country and have some kangaroo hunting and miscellaneous shooting.

EARLY RISERS

Most persons who have lived to be old have been good sleepers, but this does not mean that they have been long sleepers. A good sleeper is one who sleeps well. He may sleep quite long enough in six or seven hours to answer all his needs, and it would be folly for him to lie in bed three or four hours more. As a rule, long-lived persons have been early risers because they have been good sleepers. By "good sleep" is sleep that is sweet, sound and refreshing; the body recuperates wholly. Those who love to rise early are generally of this sort. They have strong wills and good health to begin with. Late risers are often invalids or persons of bad habits, idlers who are never free from other vices besides idleness. The nervous exhaustion which keeps a man wakeful throughout the small hours requires sleep late in the morning. This exhaustion is invariably due to one of several life-shortening influences, especially anxiety, or indiscretion in diet or drink.

Early rising is thus rather one effect of certain favourable influences, another result of which is longevity. To turn a delicate man out of bed every morning will not prolong his life unless he has slept enough. Preventing a weakly person from sleeping more than four or five hours nightly would not cause him to live to be old, but would tend to shorten his life. Early rising does not mean the time by the clock. The word has a relative significance with reference to the time of going to bed. A person who retires to rest four hours after midnight, and gets up at 10 a.m., may be strictly regarded as an "early riser." Thus early rising is synonymous with short sleeping, which means rapid recovery from fatigue, itself a sign of bodily strength. Early rising, as a practice, may be cultivated by all persons in good health. It is excellent as moral discipline, and eminently healthy as a matter of fact.

GEMS

DEPEND on no man, on no friend but him who can depend on himself. He only who acts conscientiously towards himself will act so towards others.

EACH day has its mercy and should render its praise. Fresh are the dews of each morning, and equally fresh are its blessings.

CAN man or woman choose duties? No more than they can choose their birthplace, or their father and mother.

If you want to make friends, interest yourselves in the affairs of others; do not try to interest them in yours.

If you have never tried to make anybody happy you have no idea how much pleasure you have overlooked.

STATISTICS

It is conceded by scientists that the most prolific fish is the cod, the yield of which averages about 45,000,000 eggs each season. As many as eight, nine and even nine and a half million eggs have been found in the roe of a single cod. An eel caught in Scotland in 1890 is said to have been thirty-two inches long and weighed about two pounds. The ovary was about twelve inches long as it lay in the fish, but when opened out was nearly thirty inches in length, and it was calculated that this contained upwards of 10,000,000 eggs, rivaling, if not surpassing, the cod in this respect. More than 38,000 eggs have been counted in a herring, 38,000 in a smelt, 1,000,000 in an English sole, 1,120,000 in a roach, 3,000,000 in a sturgeon, 342,000 in a carp, 383,000 in a tench, 510,000 in a mackerel, 902,000 in a perch, and 1,357,000 in a flounder. The oyster is also very prolific. It has been ascertained by observation that in the liquor of their shells small oysters can be seen by the aid of the microscope, 120 in the space of an inch,

covered with incipient shells, and swimming actively about. A herring weighing six or seven ounces is provided with about 30,000 eggs. After making all reasonable allowances for the destruction of eggs and the young, it has been estimated that in three years a single pair of herrings would produce 154,000,000.

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Helpful Talks with Our Readers

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

INDIGNANT.—What should the young man do? Why, enjoy himself to the best of his ability, and contribute all he can to the pleasure of the company. Because a young lady does a "fellow" the honour to permit him to accompany her to a party, is no reason why he should wish to prevent her enjoying the occasion in her own way. I presume there were plenty of other young ladies present willing to enter into conversation with Indignant. Too much pairing off at a party is, of course, in bad taste, and shows a selfish disposition in those who practice it. The general enjoyment should never be long lost sight of by any person present at a social gathering.

ADELA.—It is no doubt sad to feel that you are not appreciated, and that people don't understand you. Most persons are troubled with that sort of measles some time in their lives. The main reason of your feeling like that is conceit. As a matter of fact, people in the long run are appreciated just as well as they deserve. Your letter is a most egotistical one. You think you are good-looking. Well, my girl, if you were you would have no call to grieve over lack of admiration. There is nothing more certain than that every pretty girl is admired. It is one of the snares that pretty girls have to be on the watch against, and it is good to see a

pretty girl that has sense enough to take the often vapid and vacuous admiration her good looks excite at its true worth. It would appear that you have no trouble in this direction. Well, if you can't be a professional beauty you can at least try to be a good girl and a useful one. I know how frumpy that sounds, but for your comfort I will say that it is astonishing how attractive some very ordinary looking people become when they forget themselves and acquire the charm of good nature and sunny ways. The world stands in great need of sunshine. Don't bother about your style of beauty. Really be something and people will soon find it out.

PAUL BERESFORD.—The duties of a private secretary are somewhat onerous. You need to be able to write a letter in good style. An upright, and compact and withal stylish hand without superfluity in the matter of loops or flourishes is almost a necessity. Spelling must of course be immaculate. To answer correspondence of a general character from notes jotted down by the employer, and to do this intelligently and sympathetically. If the secretary of a politician, you ought to be able to collect and tabulate information on the subjects in which your employer is interested. Seize salient points and summarize them. Then, the private secretary is supposed to stand between his employer and the too intrusive outside world. He must have tact, knowledge of human character, a quick eye to discern imposters, and the intention of a woman. So you see that having mapped out this line of life for yourself you will need to plough the field of your brain thoroughly and scatter good seed thereon if you wish to gather a plentiful harvest. Attend to your appearance, your clothes, your manners, your conversation. Educate and discipline yourself.

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Every one who reads the "LONDON READER" likes it, and every day we get letters from those who delight in its fascinating stories. There are still, however, some people who do not know about this grand publication, and we want to secure them. We do not intend to spend a lot of money over advertising it, but propose to devote the money that would otherwise be so spent in giving presents to our readers who will do us a little service.

WHAT WE ASK YOU TO DO

We want you to talk to all your friends about the "LONDON READER" and persuade them to pay a newsagent 1s. for the next twelve numbers and give you the receipts. Forward these receipts to us with your name and address and we will send you valuable gifts according to the number of subscribers you obtain. Just think for a moment and remember that a few minutes work will give you a beautiful brooch or name bangle; and an hour's work will secure you a genuine silver watch. Don't miss this magnificent chance.

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